

THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST



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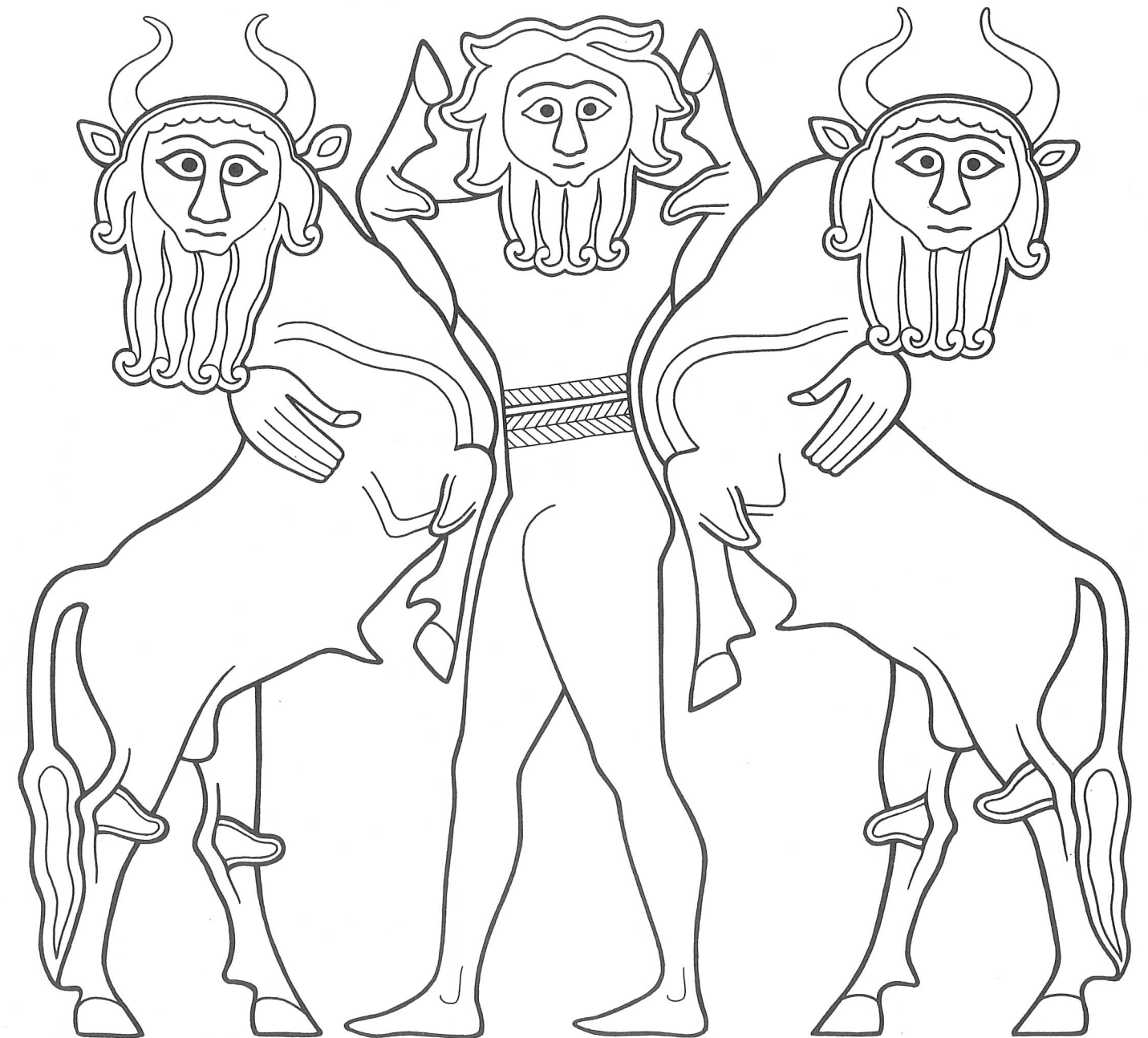


*Bellerophon Books are
worth harping about !*

The Assyrian demon on the front cover,
and the Assyrian soldiers on the back cover,
are both from reliefs from Nimrud, Ninth
century B.C. The lyre player, here, is from
the Standard of Ur, Early Dynastic III
(26th century B.C.). All: British Museum.

GILGAMESH CONQUERS TWO BULLS

From a plaque of shell inlay from the soundbox of a
lyre from Ur. Sumerian, Early Dynastic III (26th
century B.C.) University Museum, Philadelphia.



Gilgamesh was the most famous hero of the Sumerians, a people who settled along the banks
of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in southern Mesopotamia at least by the 4th millennium B.C.,
where they developed a civilization which influenced all later peoples in Mesopotamia. Gilgamesh,
who was a semi-legendary king of the Sumerian city-state Uruk, had to fight for his life with a
wild bull which the goddess Inanna sent to kill him when he rejected her marriage proposal.

MUSICAL MESOPOTAMIANS

From a plaque of shell inlay from the soundbox of a lyre from Ur. Sumerian, Early Dynastic III (26th century B.C.), University Museum, Philadelphia.



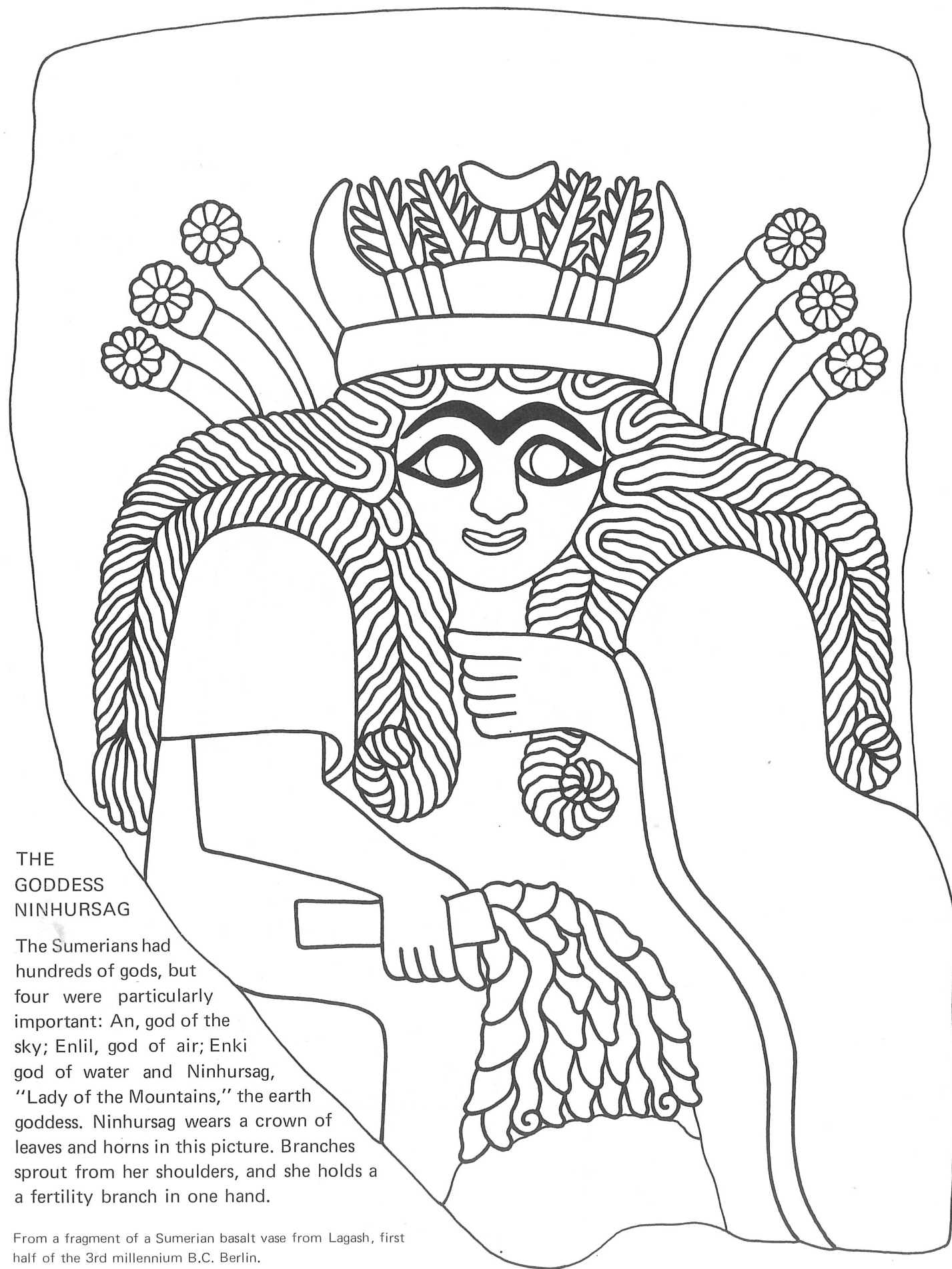
The donkey plays a lyre, the jackal plays a hand-drum and a sistrum, and the bear claps and dances. Little orchestras, consisting of string players, pipers and percussionists, are known from the end of the 4th millennium B.C on, and ancient Mesopotamian musical scales were much like our own from about 2000 B.C., if not earlier.

MARI HAD A LITTLE LAMB

From a mother of pearl inlay from the temple of Ninhursag at Mari, middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. Louvre.

During the 3rd millennium B.C. Mesopotamia, the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was inhabited by Sumerian and Semitic peoples. Several cities, such as Mari, Nippur, Ur and Lagash, formed the centers of small states, each devoted to a god. This man from Mari is bringing a gift for the goddess Ninhursag.





THE GODDESS NINHURSAG

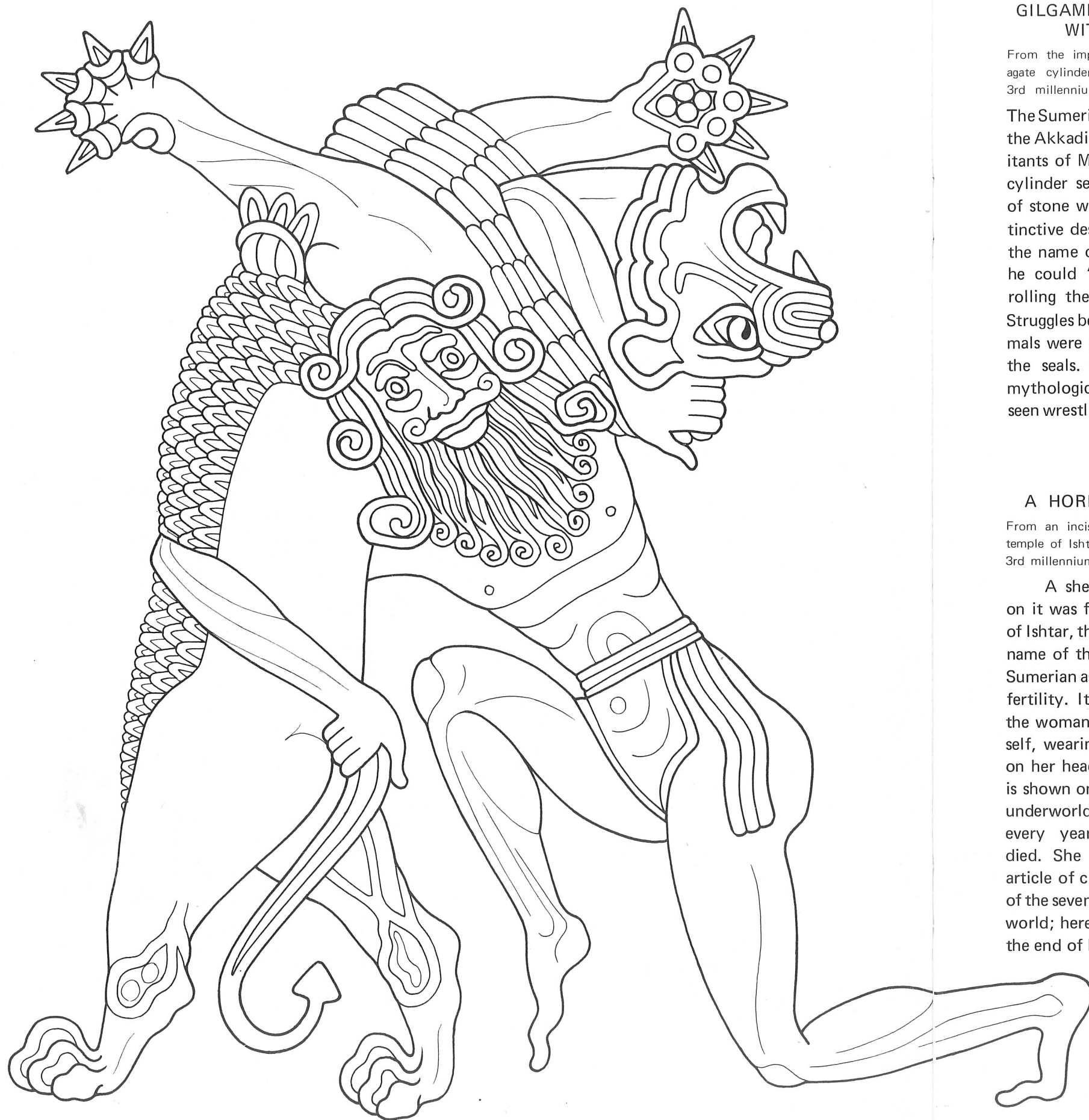
The Sumerians had hundreds of gods, but four were particularly important: An, god of the sky; Enlil, god of air; Enki god of water and Ninhursag, "Lady of the Mountains," the earth goddess. Ninhursag wears a crown of leaves and horns in this picture. Branches sprout from her shoulders, and she holds a fertility branch in one hand.

From a fragment of a Sumerian basalt vase from Lagash, first half of the 3rd millennium B.C. Berlin.



THE STANDARD OF MARI

From the mosaic panel, the "Standard of Mari," pearl-shell from the Temple of Ishtar, Mari. Sumerian, mid-3rd millennium B.C. Louvre.



GILGAMESH GRAPPLING WITH A LION

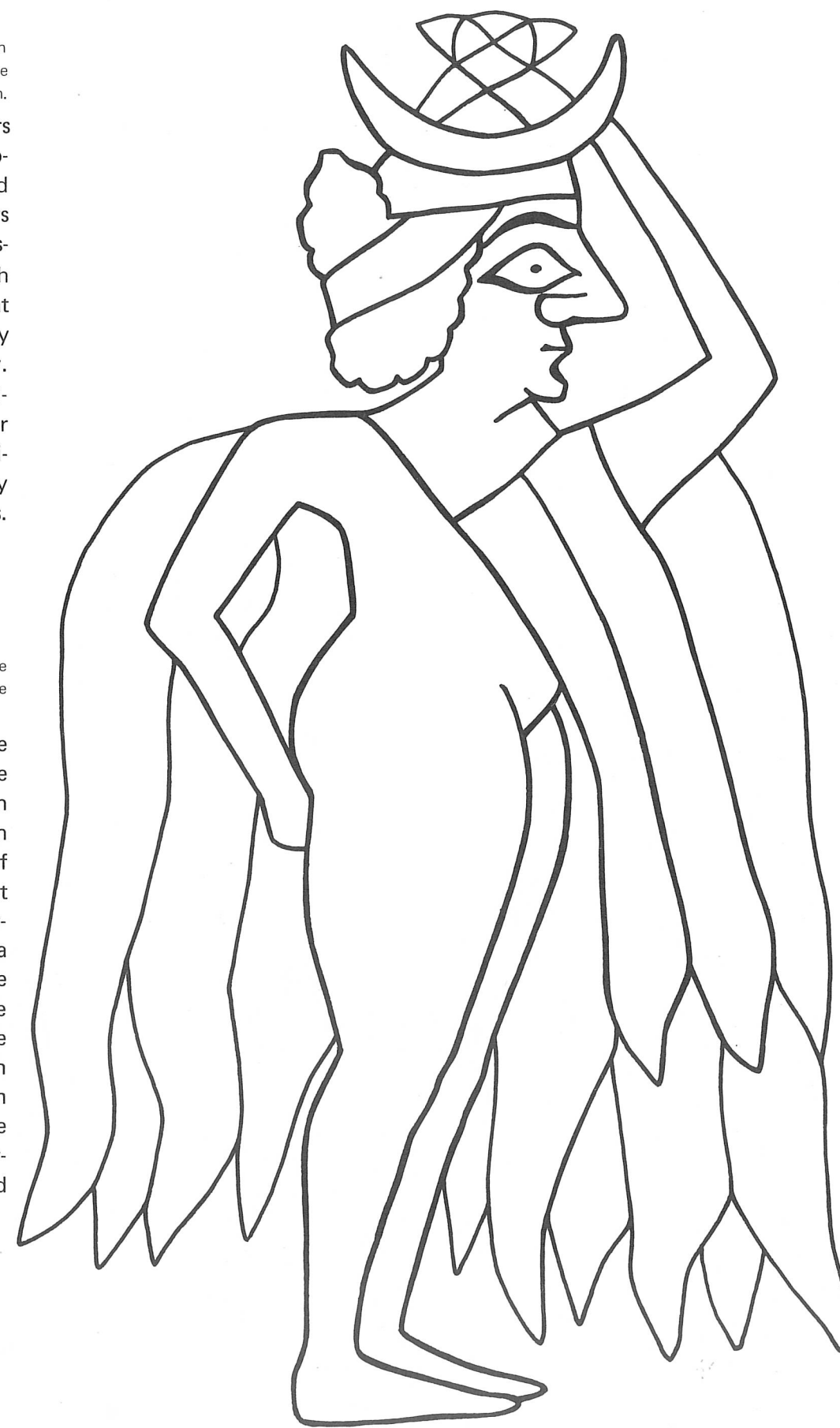
From the impression of an Akkadian agate cylinder seal, 2nd half of the 3rd millennium B.C. British Museum.

The Sumerians, their successors the Akkadians, and later inhabitants of Mesopotamia all used cylinder seals. Small cylinders of stone were carved with distinctive designs and often with the name of the owner so that he could "sign" his name by rolling the seal on soft clay. Struggles between men and animals were popular subjects for the seals. Gilgamesh, a semi-mythological hero, is frequently seen wrestling with wild beasts.

A HORNED GODDESS

From an incised pearl shell from the temple of Ishtar at Mari, middle of the 3rd millennium B.C. Louvre.

A shell with this picture on it was found at the temple of Ishtar, the Semitic Akkadian name of the goddess known in Sumerian as Inanna, goddess of fertility. It is very likely that the woman is the goddess herself, wearing the horned tiara on her head. If it is Ishtar, she is shown on her journey to the underworld, which took place every year when vegetation died. She had to remove an article of clothing at every one of the seven gates to the underworld; here she is seen toward the end of her journey.



SOLDIERS OF LAGASH

From the limestone victory stele of Eannatum, ruler of Lagash, from Telloh. Sumerian, 25th century B.C. Louvre.

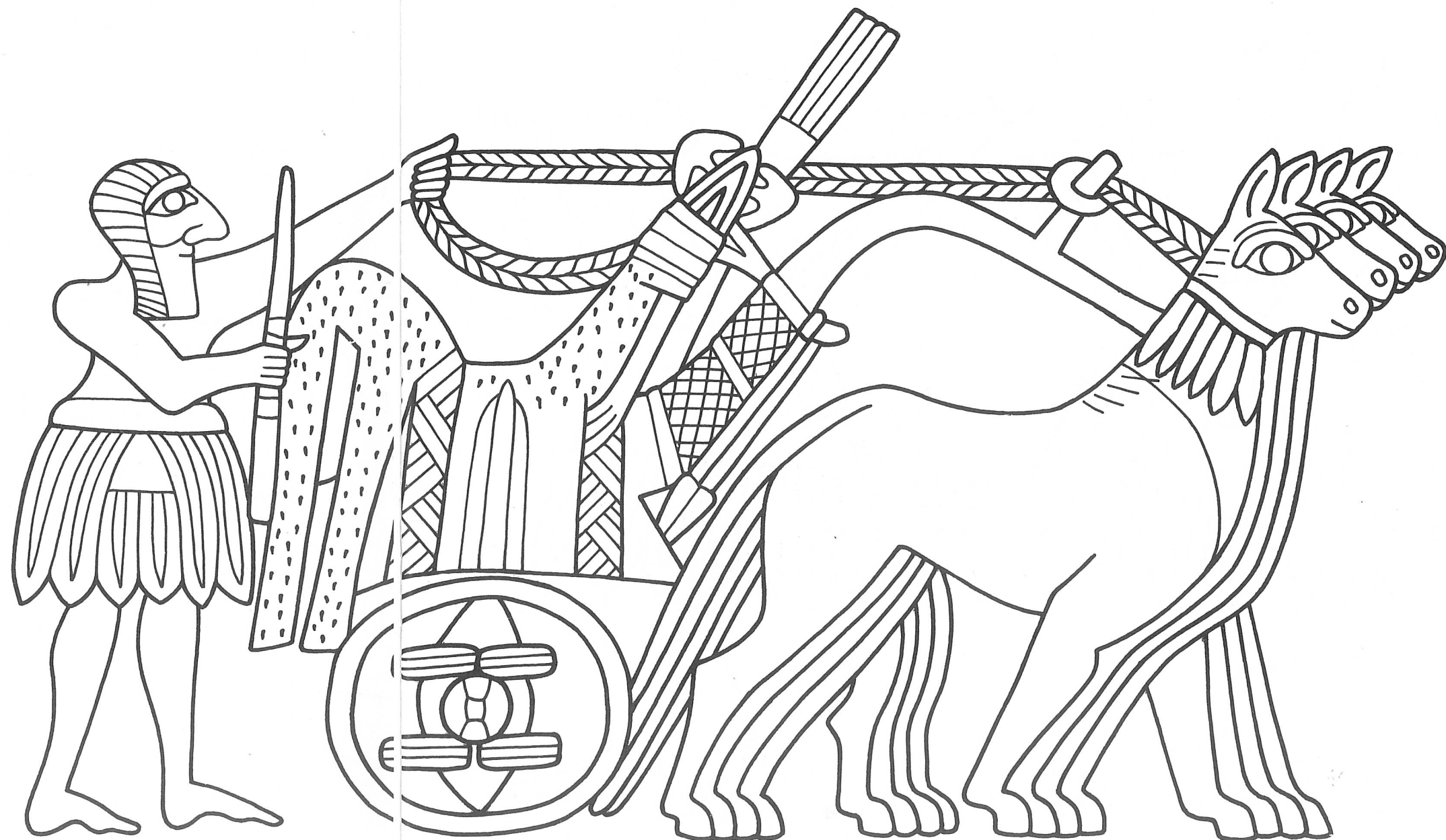
These soldiers of King Eannatum are marching against the neighboring town of Umma, which they are about to conquer; the two cities often fought over water rights. They wear leather helmets, leather strips across their chests, and long wool skirts, and they carry spears and battle axes.



A SUMERIAN FOUR-HORSE CHARIOT

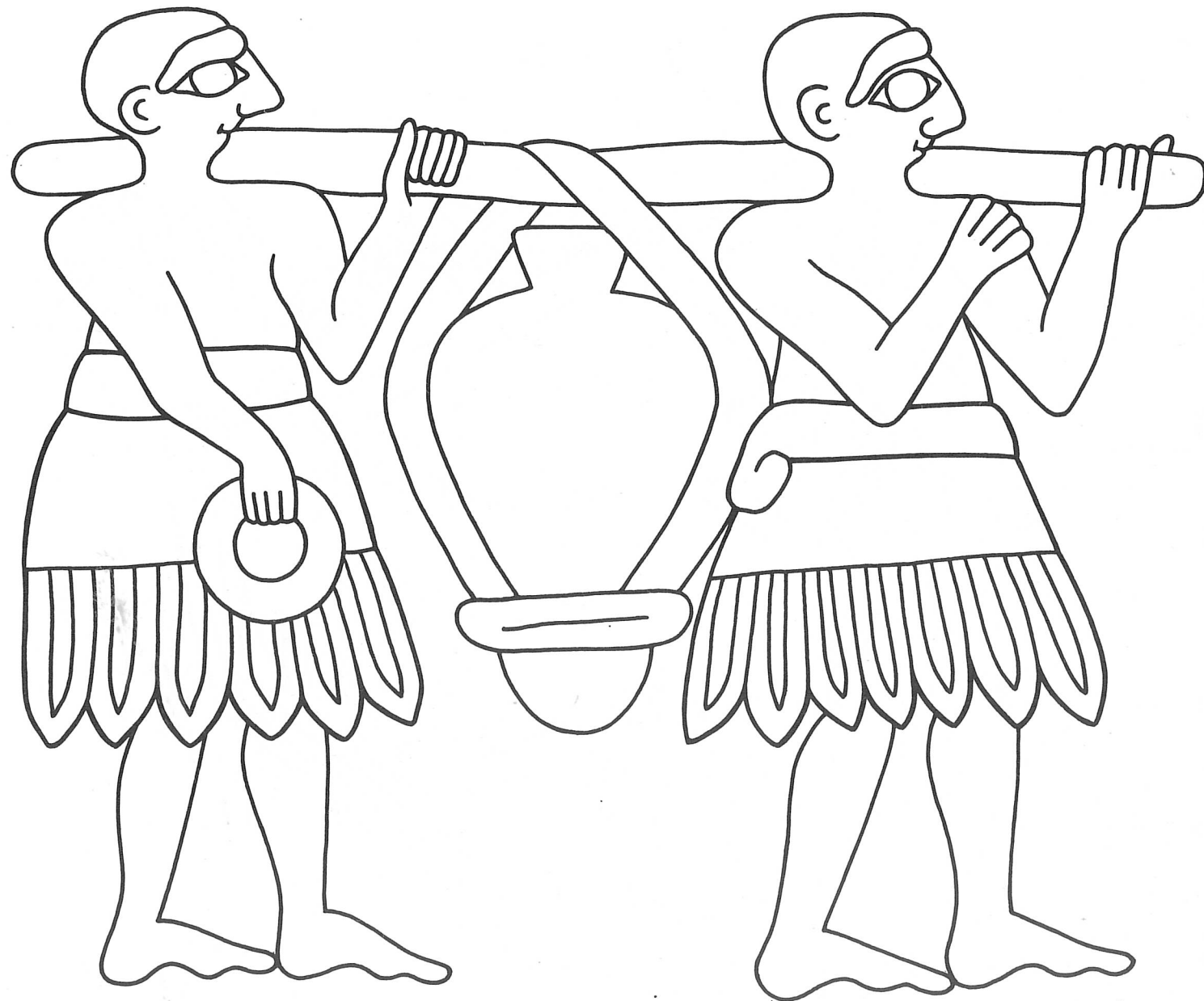
From a limestone plaque from Ur, now in the University Museum, Philadelphia. Sumerian, Early Dynastic II period (27-26th century B.C.). The heads of the onagers are restored from a plaque from Khafaje in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad.

The seat is covered with panther skins, and a quiver is filled with arrows. The chariot is being driven in a procession, possibly in celebration of the New Year festival.



From a relief from a stone votive plaque from Khafaje, Early Dynastic II Period (27-26th centuries B.C.).

These two servants are bringing a large jar of liquid refreshment (probably beer) for a Sumerian banquet, perhaps a New Year's celebration to insure the fertility of the fields. The "doughnut" carried by the man at left is a ring-stand on which the pointed jar will be placed.



THE GODDESS ASHERAH

From the ivory lid of an unguent box in the Levanto-Mycenean style, from Minet-el-Beida, c. 1300-1200 B.C.



A female divinity, possibly the Canaanite mother-goddess, Asherah, who offers ears of grain to two goats. Goats and other animals are often shown in the same position on either side of the tree of life. Here Asherah, sustaining the goats with grain, takes the place of the tree of life.

GUDEA LED BY NINGIZZIDA

From a limestone stele of Gudea from Tellōh (Lagash). Neo-Sumerian (2144-2124 B.C.), Berlin. The face of Gudea is restored from a stele in the Louvre.

Gudea, a great governor of the Sumerians, was called upon by Ningizzida, the god of Irrigation, to build a temple in exchange for an abundant great builder; here he carries a palm branch from the Tree of Life and a square, a tool of construction.



A SCORPION-MAN WITH A DRAWN BOW AND ARROW

From a boundary stone or kudurru of white limestone, dating to the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar I. 1125-1104 B.C. British Museum.



HAMMURAPI RECEIVES THE LAWS

From a basalt stele found in Susa, originally from Babylonia, 1792-1704 B.C. Louvre.

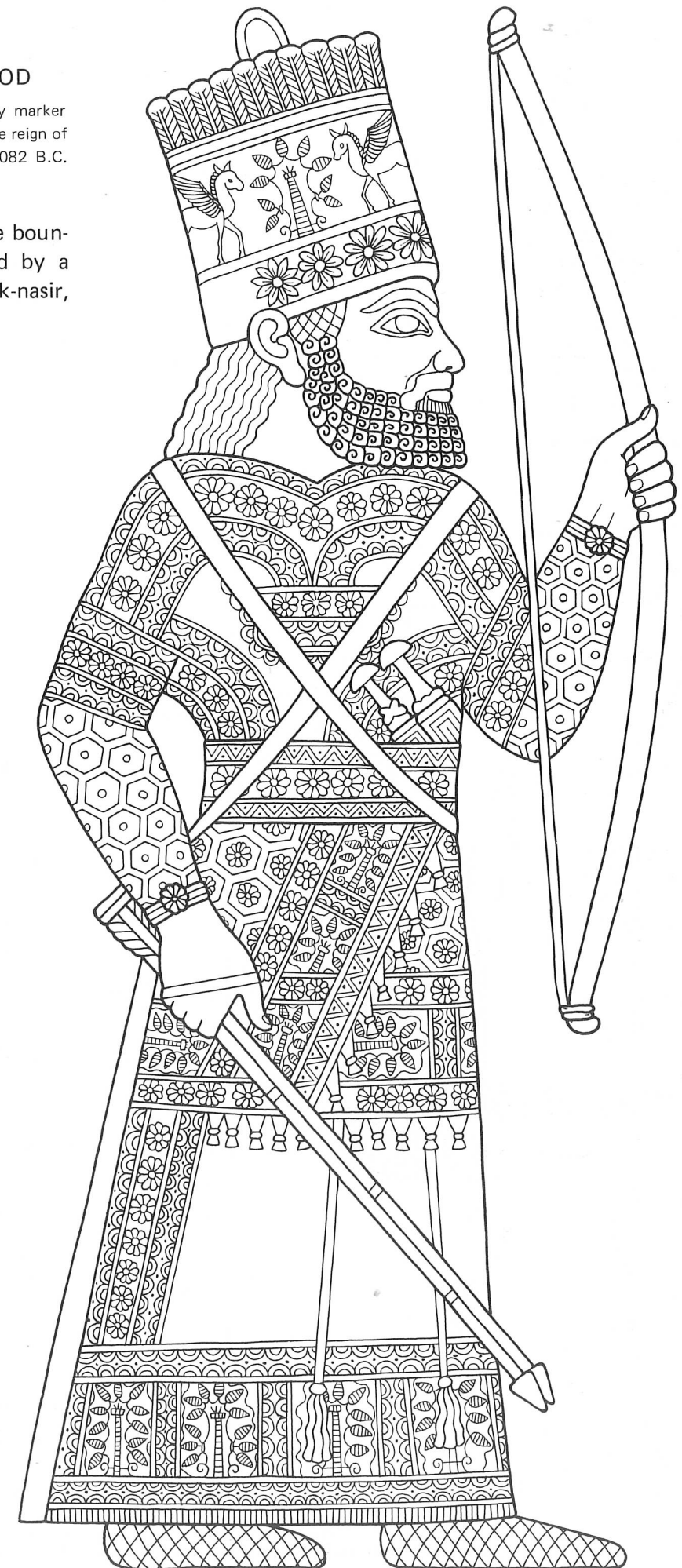
Under the rule of King Hammurapi, famed for his great legal code, Babylon reached the height of its power and ruled all of Mesopotamia. The seated sun god, Shamash, wearing the horned crown and with flames springing from his shoulders, offers the "rod" and the "ring" (probably a ruler and measuring cord) to Hammurapi, symbolizing a transfer of power from god to king. The god dictates the laws to the worshipping king. Below this picture on the stele are inscribed 282 laws.



A GUARDIAN GOD

From a limestone boundary marker of Marduk-nasir, dated to the reign of Marduk-nadin-ahhe, 1099-1082 B.C. British Museum.

This god guarded the boundary of land owned by a royal official, Marduk-nasir, forever.

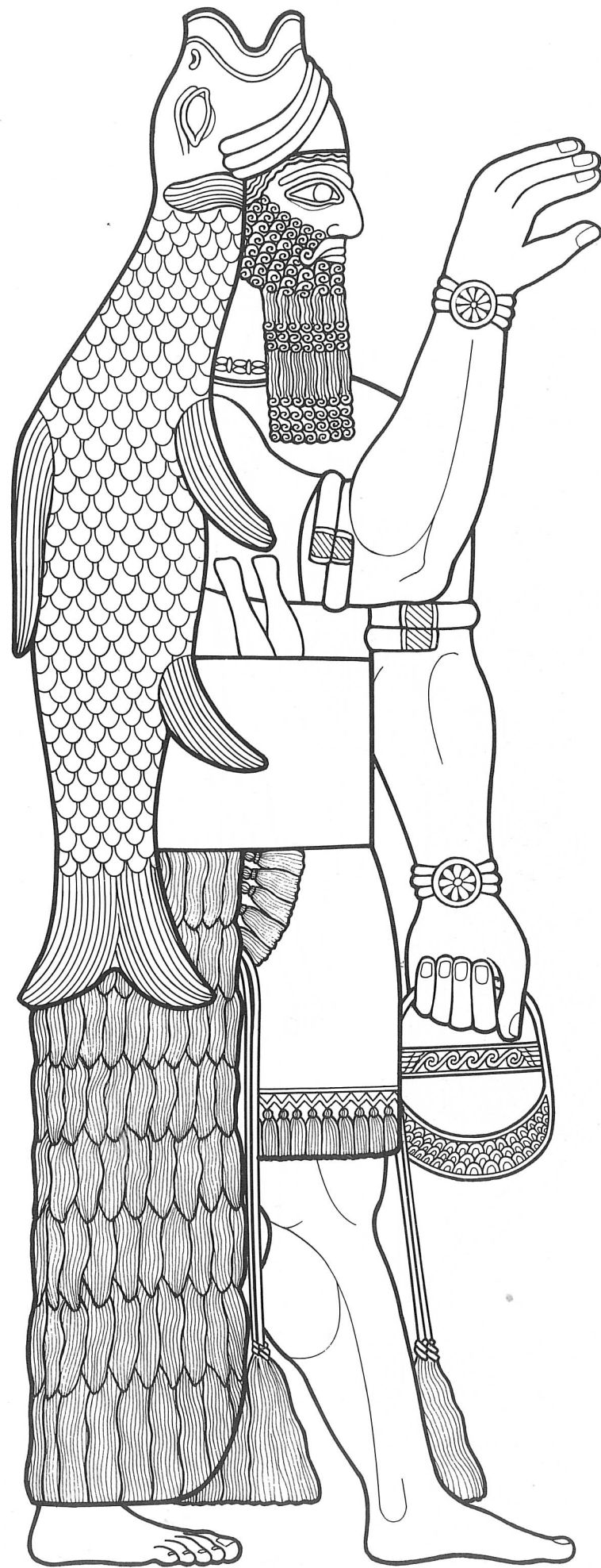


A PRIEST IN FISH HEADDRESS

From a relief from Nimrud, now in the British Museum. Assyrian, 9th century B.C.

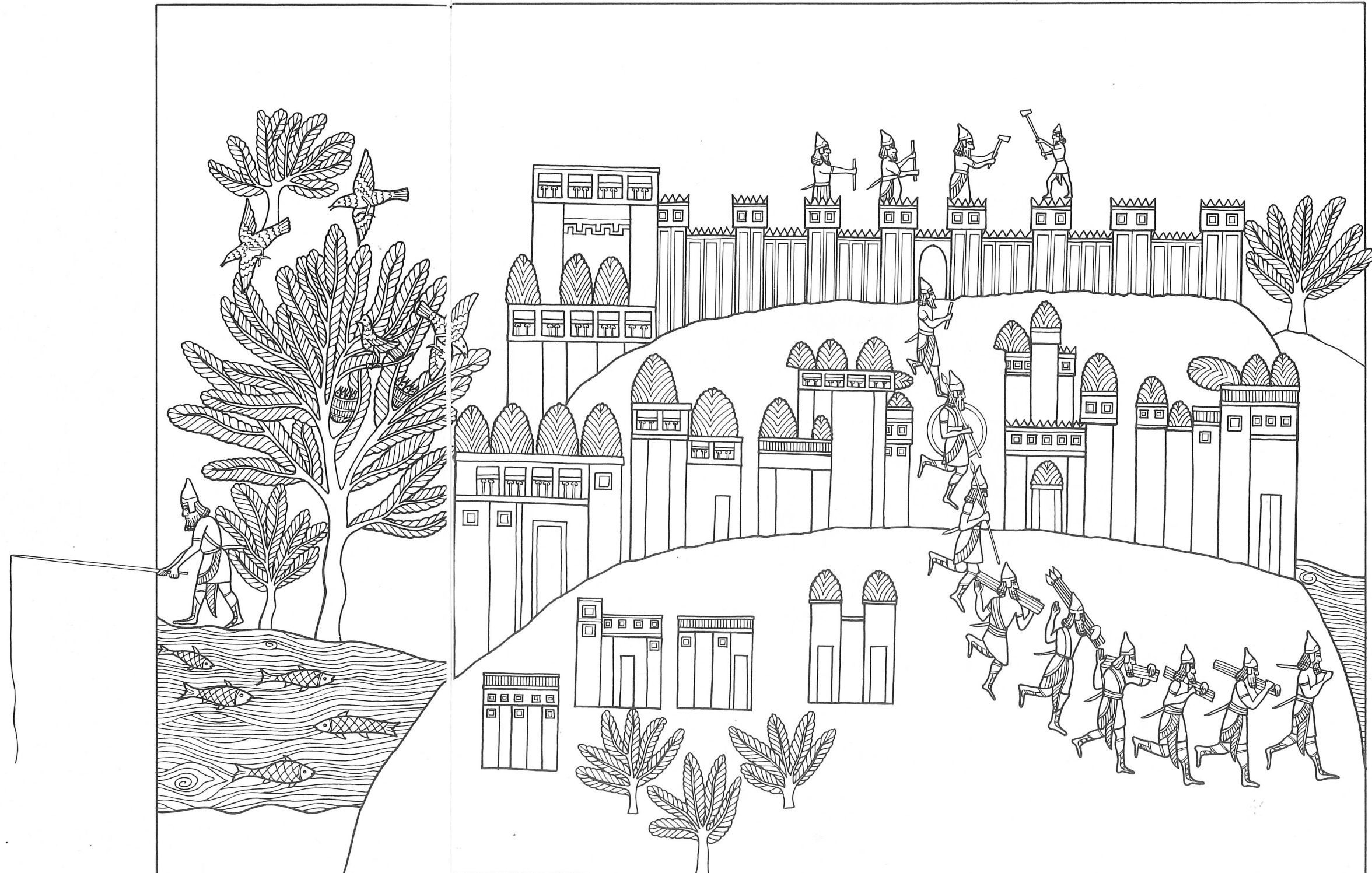
ASSYRIAN SOLDIERS LEAVING A CITY ON THE UPPER EUPHRATES

From a relief from the Palace of Sennacherib, from Nineveh, now in the British Museum. Assyrian, 8th century B.C.



The first wise man or sage in Ancient Mesopotamian tradition was a fish-man who swam to shore bringing the arts of civilization to Sumer from the watery deep. Here, an Assyrian priest in fish costume takes part in a religious ceremony, probably for Ea, god of the sweet underground waters and of wisdom and the arts and crafts.

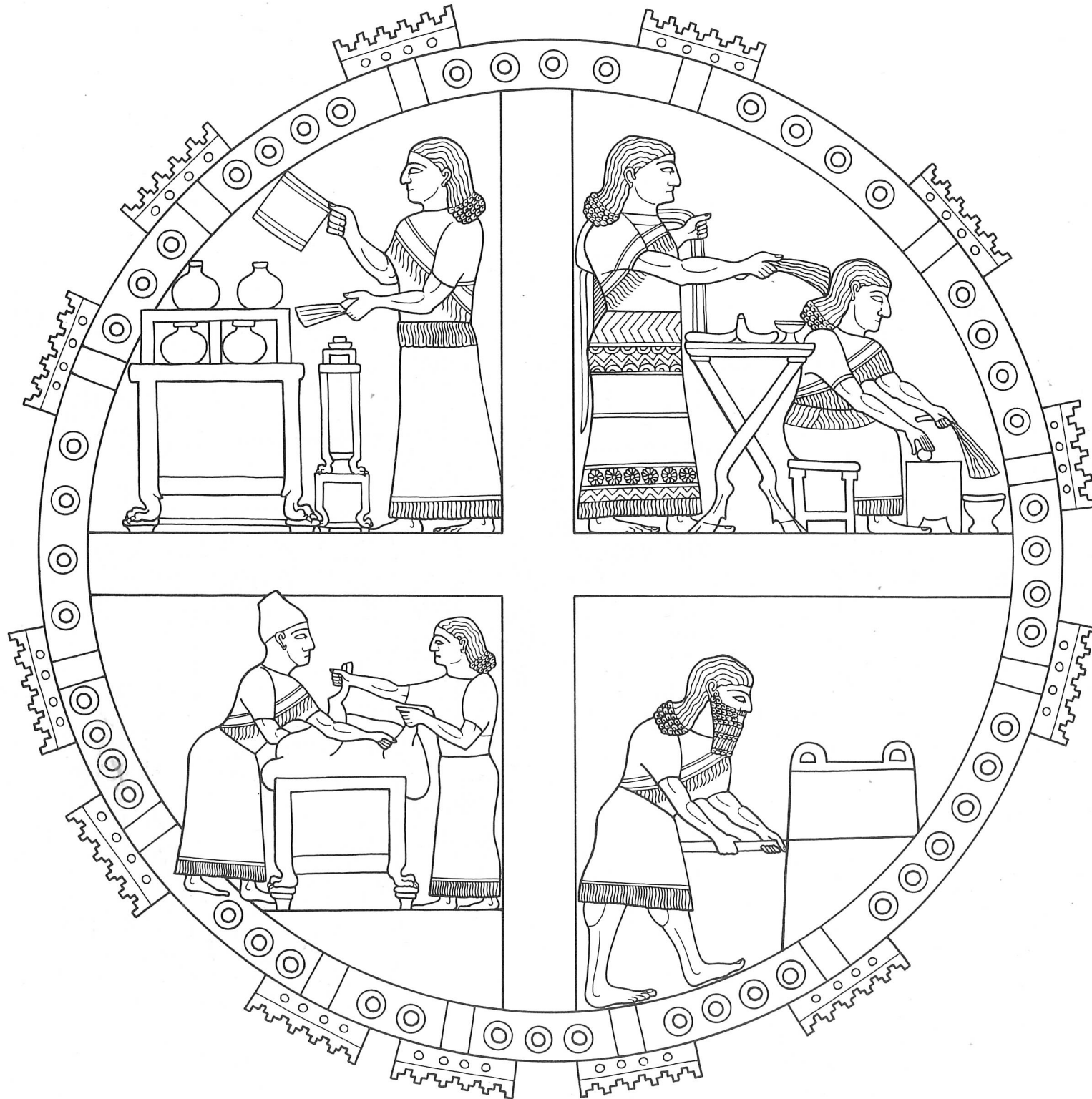
Other divinities associated with fish and water are the goddess Nanshe, (daughter of Ea) popular with the Sumerians as an interpreter of dreams, and the god Dagan, whose cult was especially popular among the Semitic peoples of Syria and the Mediterranean coast.



AN ASSYRIAN ENCAMPMENT

From a relief from the throne room of the North West Palace at Nimrud; Assyrian, 9th century B.C. British Museum.

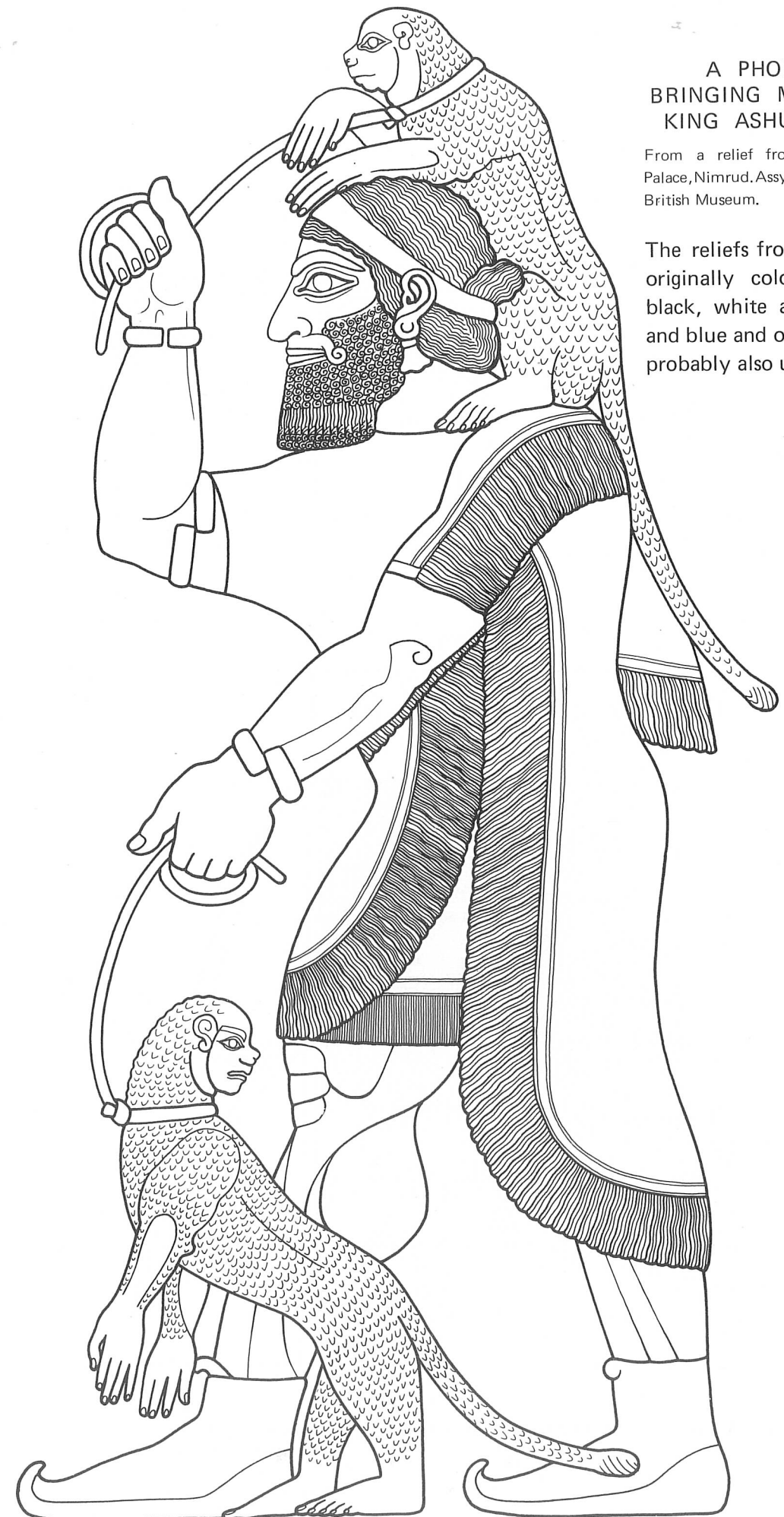
A butcher, a baker and other food makers are at work.



A PHOENICIAN BRINGING MONKEYS TO KING ASHURNASIRPAL

From a relief from the North West Palace, Nimrud. Assyrian, 9th century B.C. British Museum.

The reliefs from Nimrud were originally colored. Traces of black, white and red survive, and blue and other colors were probably also used.

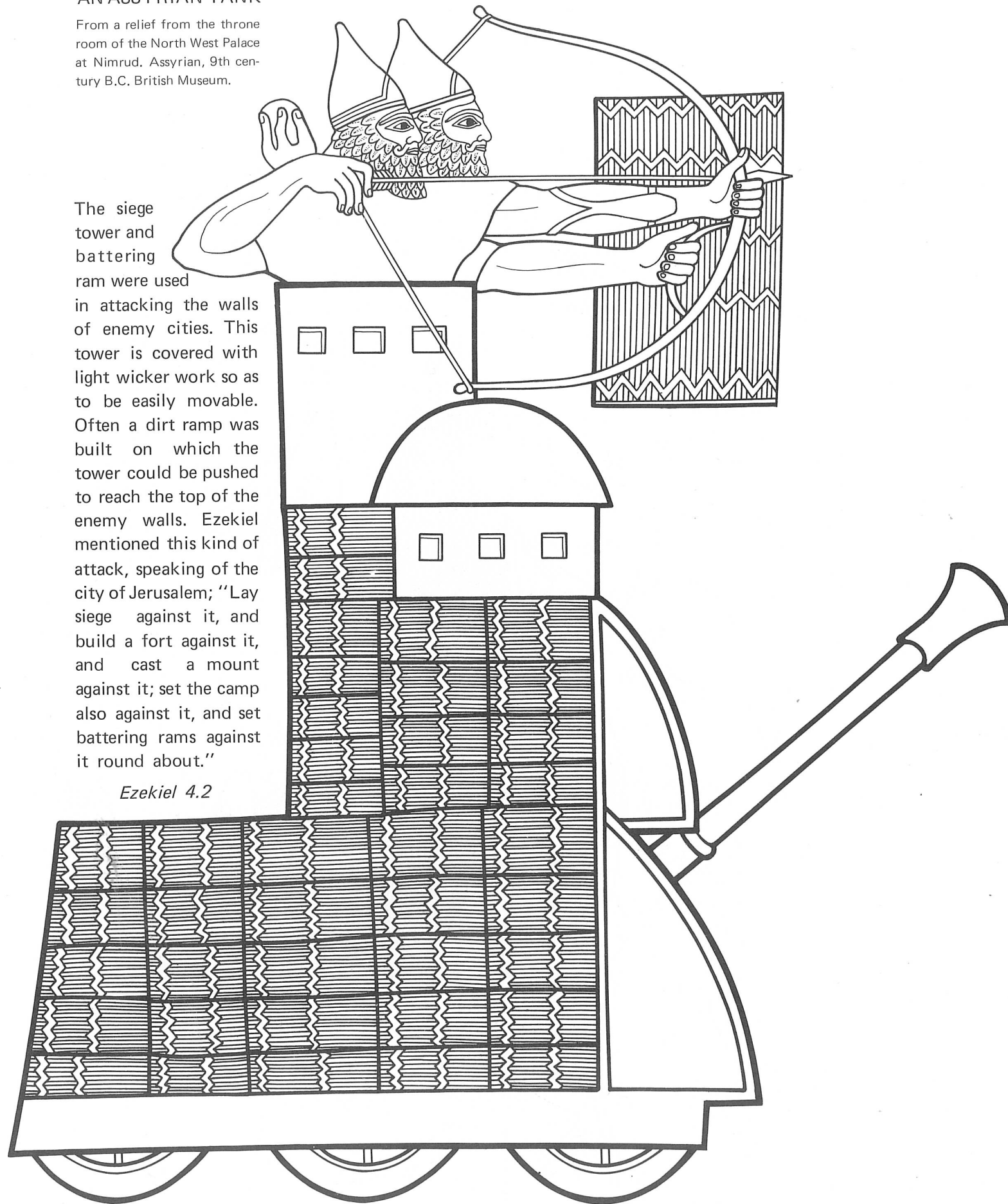


AN ASSYRIAN TANK

From a relief from the throne room of the North West Palace at Nimrud. Assyrian, 9th century B.C. British Museum.

The siege tower and battering ram were used in attacking the walls of enemy cities. This tower is covered with light wicker work so as to be easily movable. Often a dirt ramp was built on which the tower could be pushed to reach the top of the enemy walls. Ezekiel mentioned this kind of attack, speaking of the city of Jerusalem; "Lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about."

Ezekiel 4.2

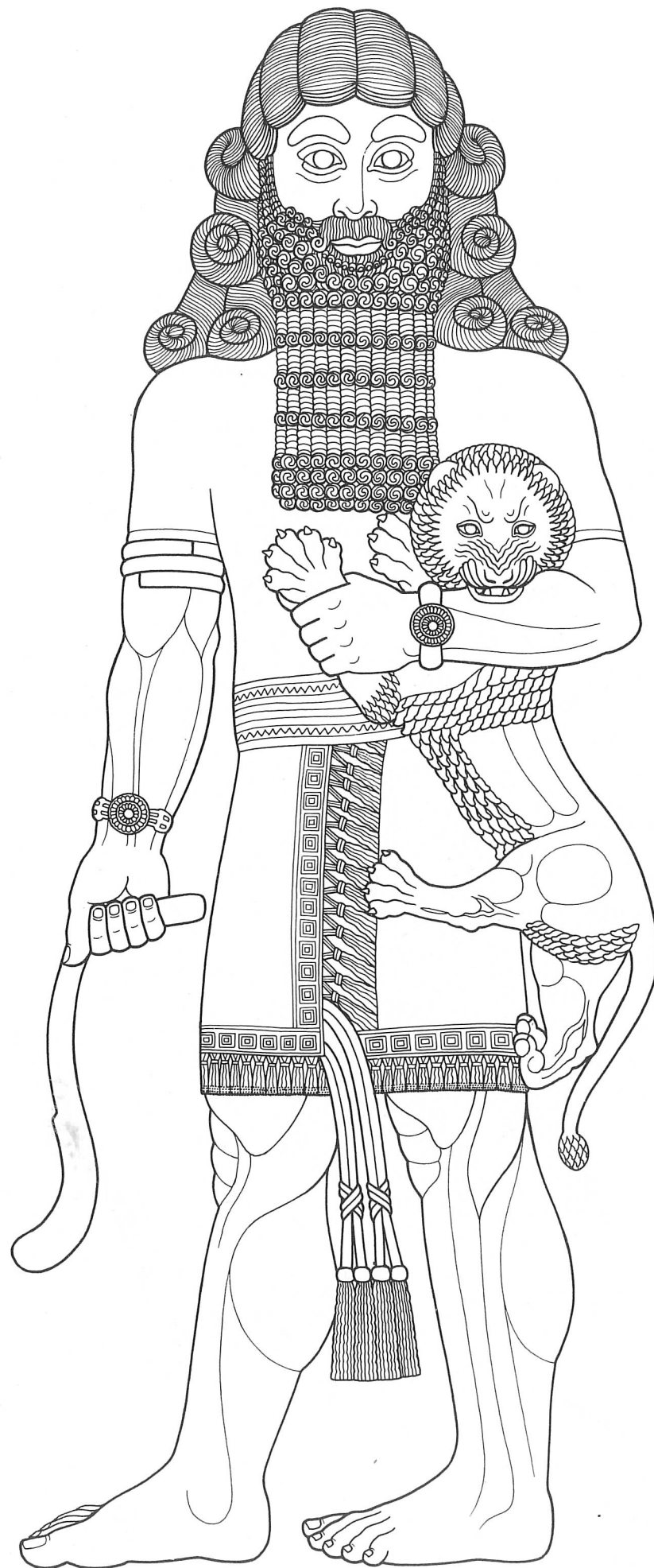


A WINGED DEMON FLEEING FROM THE GOD NINURTA

From a relief from the Temple of Ninurta, Nimrud. Assyrian, 9th century B.C. British Museum.

AN HEROIC FIGURE,
PERHAPS GILGAMESH,
WITH A LION CUB.

From a relief from the throne-room of the
Palace of Sargon II (721 - 705 B.C.),
Khorsabad. Assyrian. Louvre.



AN ELAMITE LADY SPINNING

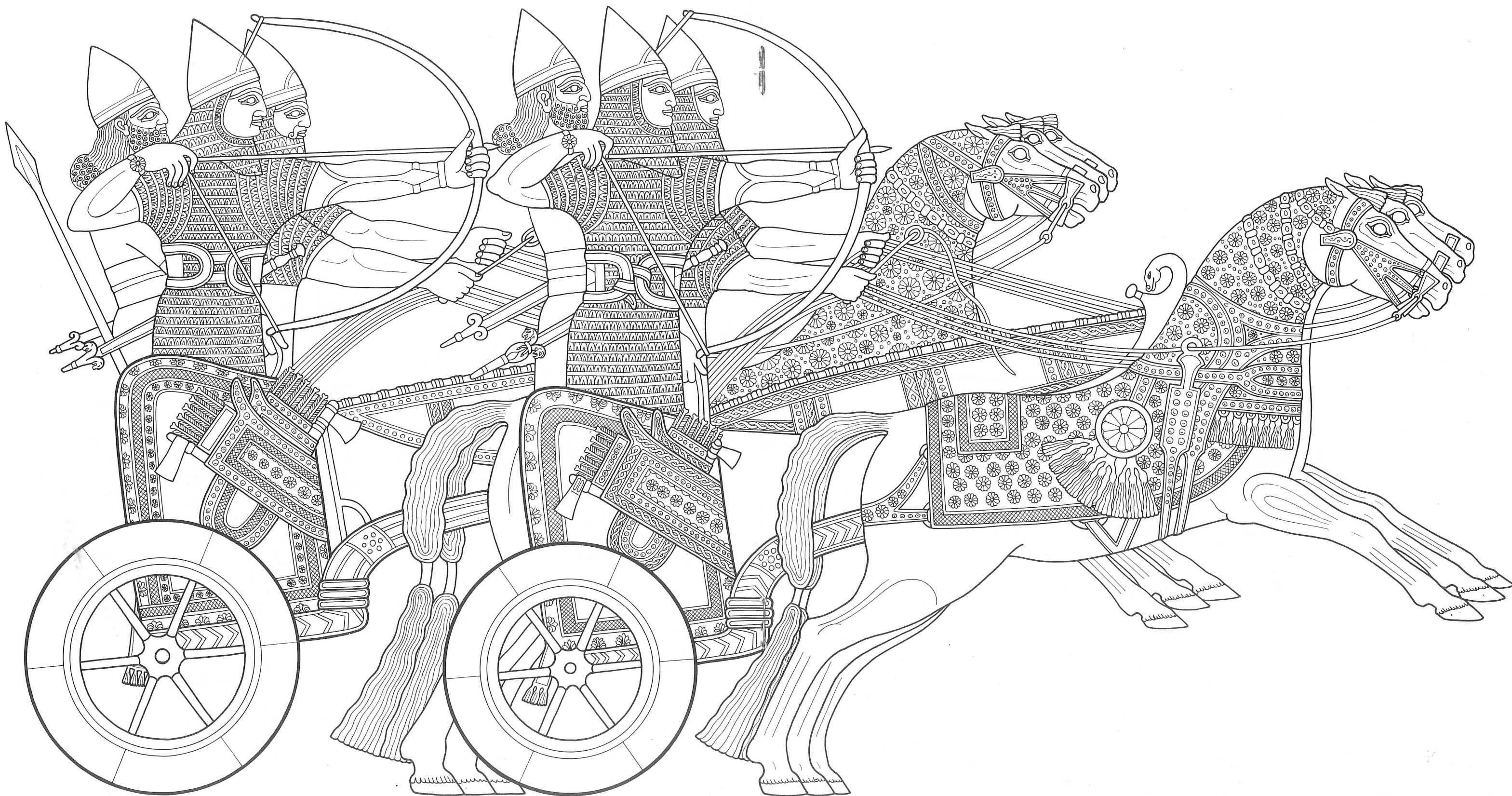
From a Neo-Elamite relief from Susa, 8th-7th century B.C. Louvre.

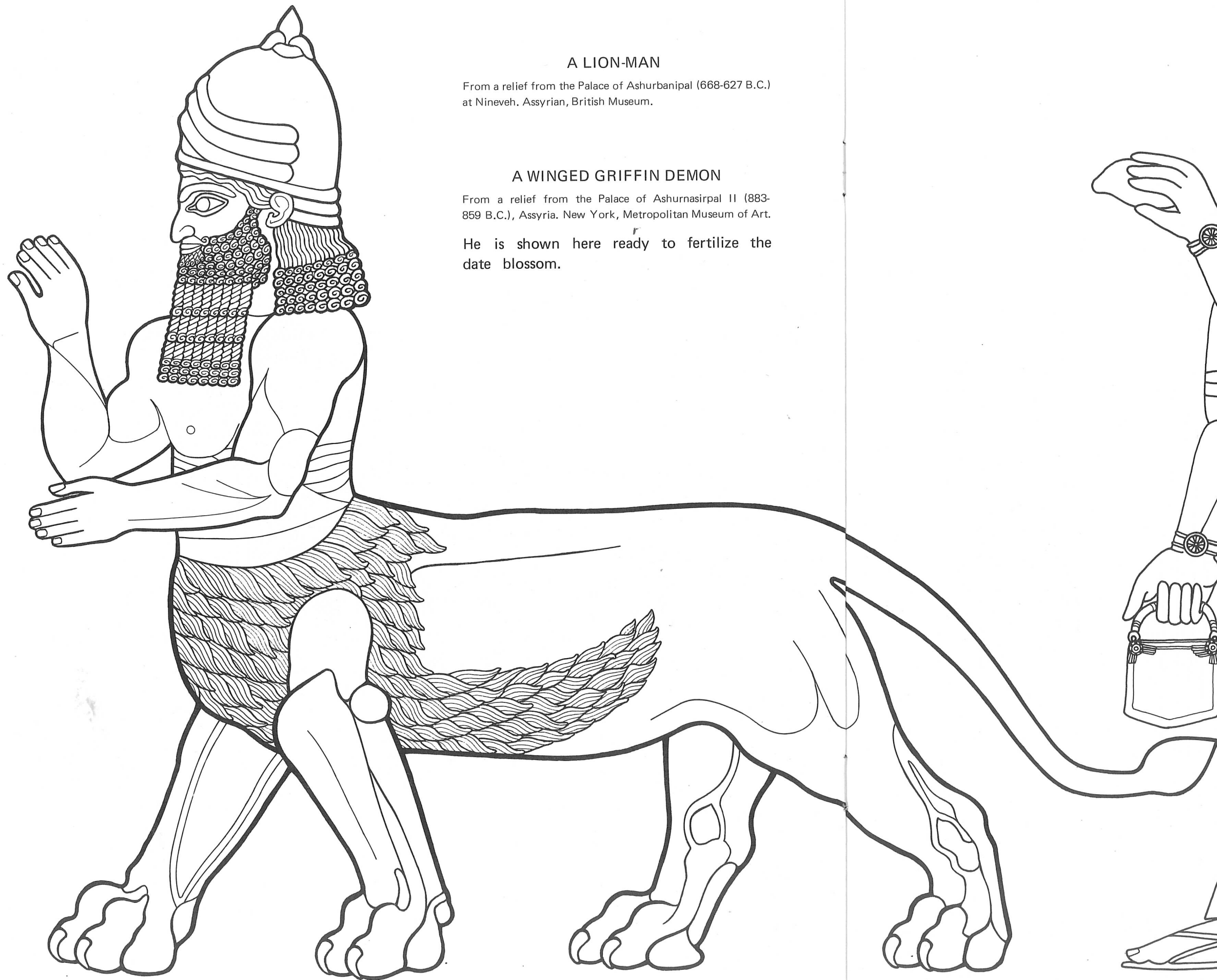
Elam was located to the east of Sumer, on the east side of the river Tigris. Susa, one of the chief cities of Elam, was also one of the most ancient urban centers. We know much less about Elam than we do about Sumer, partly because fewer written records were left by the Elamites. Although Elam was greatly influenced by Sumer, it retained many of its own traditions.



ASSYRIAN WAR CHARIOTS

From a damaged relief in the North West
Palace at Nimrud, 8th century B.C.





A LION-MAN

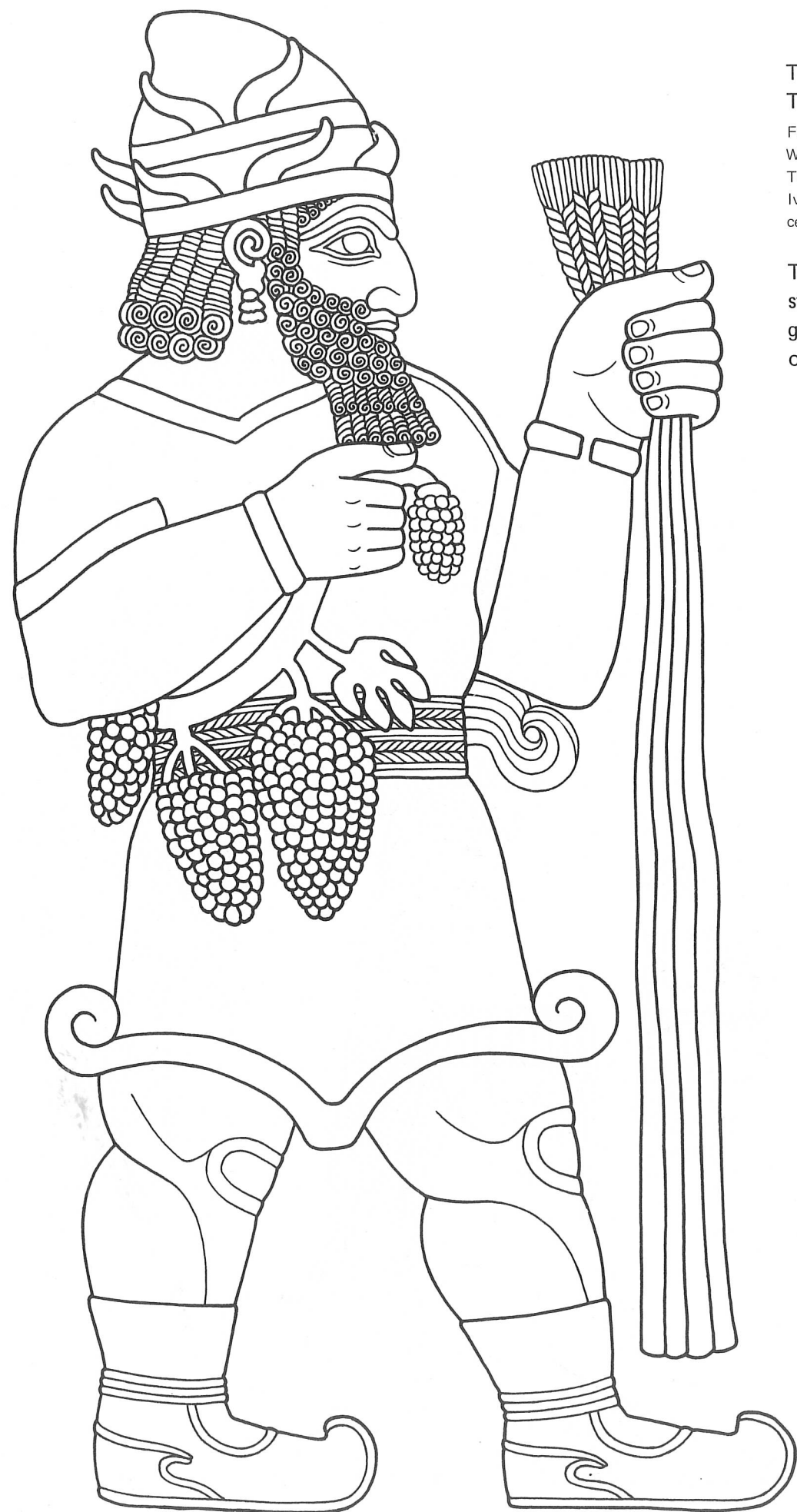
From a relief from the Palace of Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.)
at Nineveh. Assyrian, British Museum.

A WINGED GRIFFIN DEMON

From a relief from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883-
859 B.C.), Assyria. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

He is shown here ready to fertilize the
date blossom.





THE GOD OF PLENTY WITH THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH

From a relief carved on living rock with Warpalawas (not depicted), King of Tyana, before the god of Plenty. Near Ivriz, S.E. Anatolia, 2nd half of the 8th century B.C.

The bunches of grapes and stalks of grain which the god holds symbolize his power over crops and vegetation.



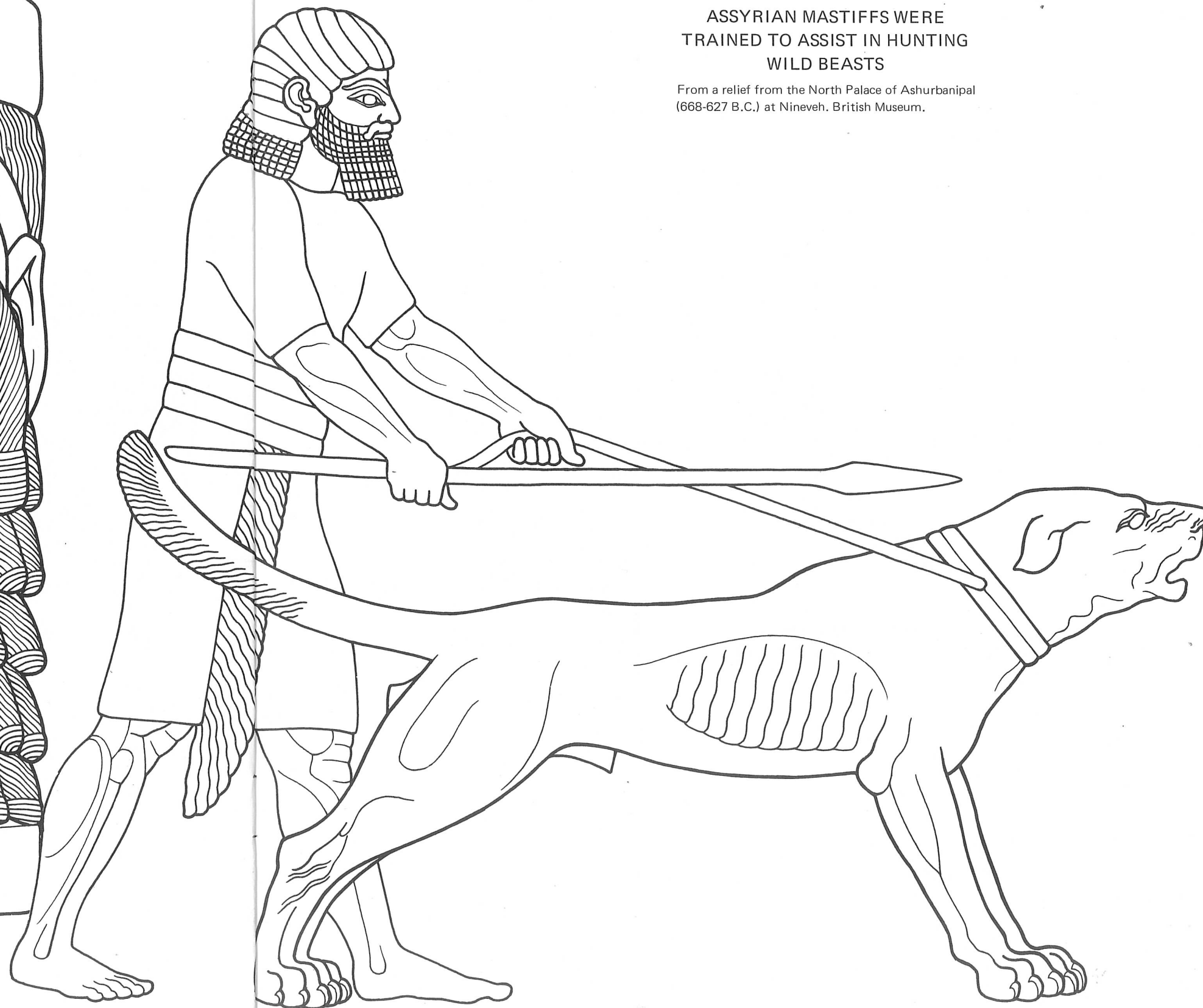
A BAND OF FEMALE MUSICIANS ENTERTAINING AT A GARDEN PARTY, with (left to right) Psaltery, Frame Drum & Double Pipes.

From a Syrian-style ivory pyxis from the Southeast Palace at Nimrud, 9th - 8th century B.C. British Museum.



THE MONA LISA OF NIMRUD

From an ivory carving found in a well at Nimrud in 1952. 8th century B.C. Baghdad Museum.



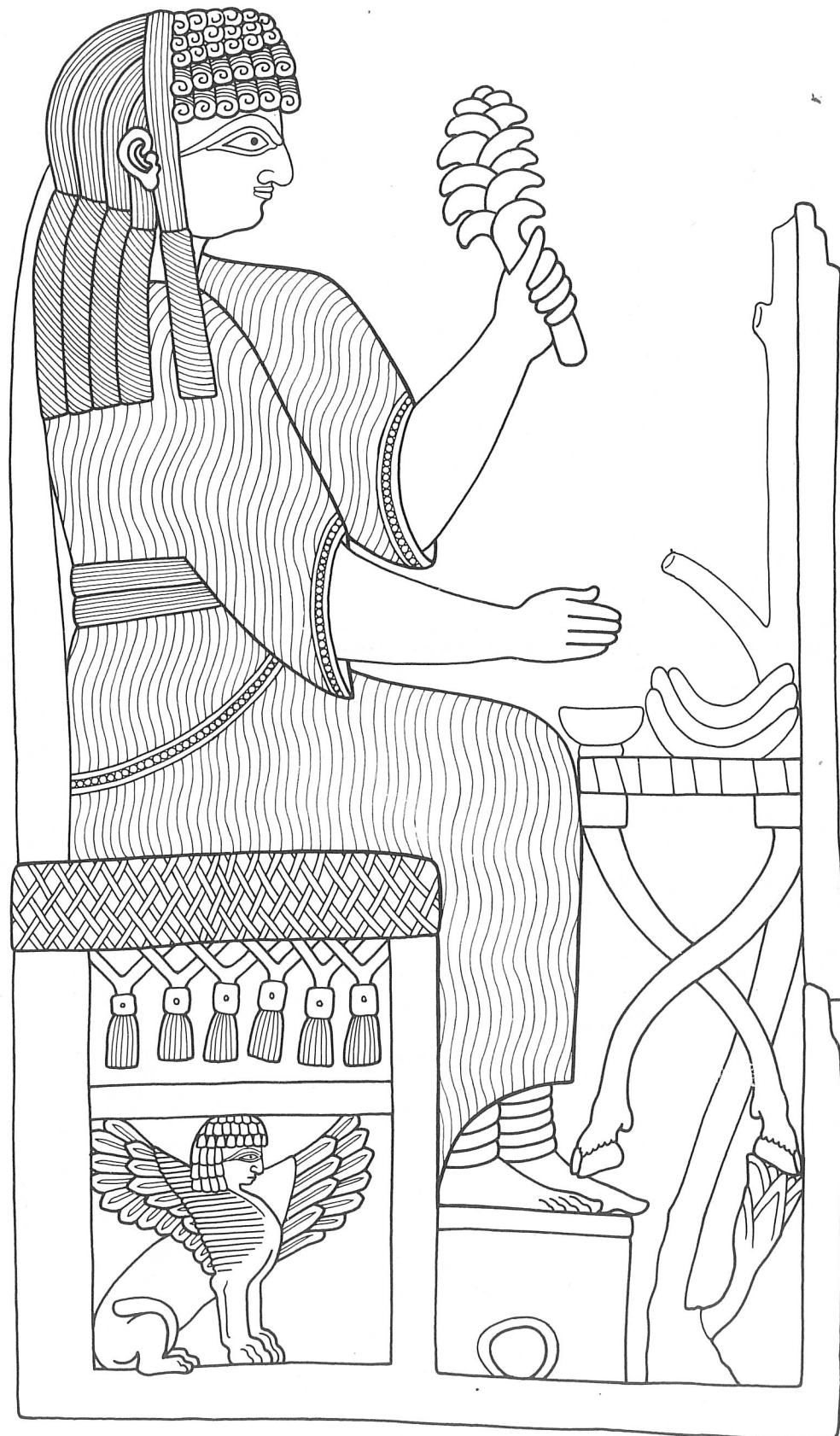
ASSYRIAN MASTIFFS WERE
TRAINED TO ASSIST IN HUNTING
WILD BEASTS

From a relief from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal
(668-627 B.C.) at Nineveh. British Museum.

A WOMAN SITTING BEFORE A TABLE

From an ivory plaque used to decorate furniture, found at Nimrud. 8th century B.C. Iraq Museum, Baghdad.

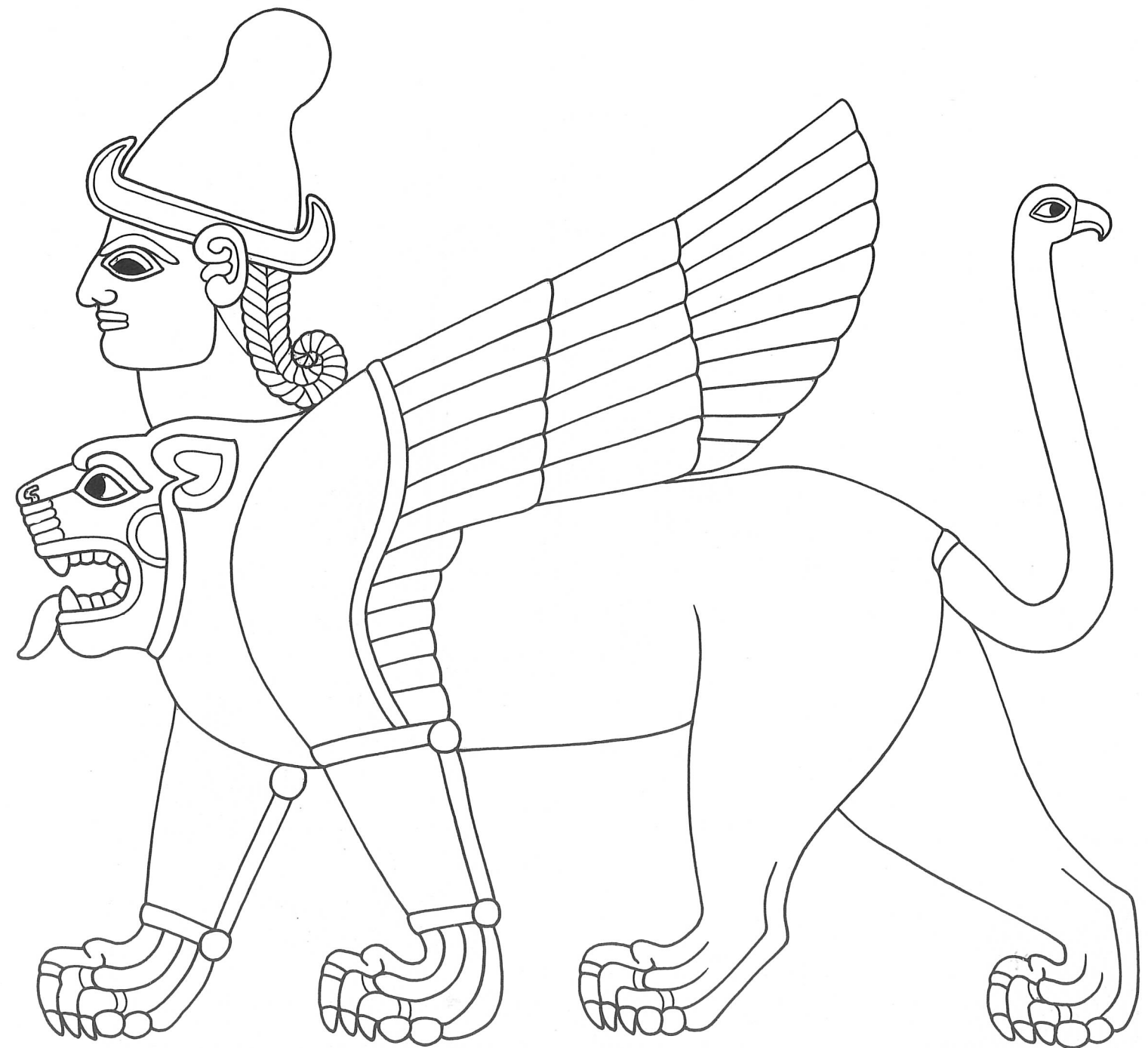
A sphinx decorates the bottom of her throne.

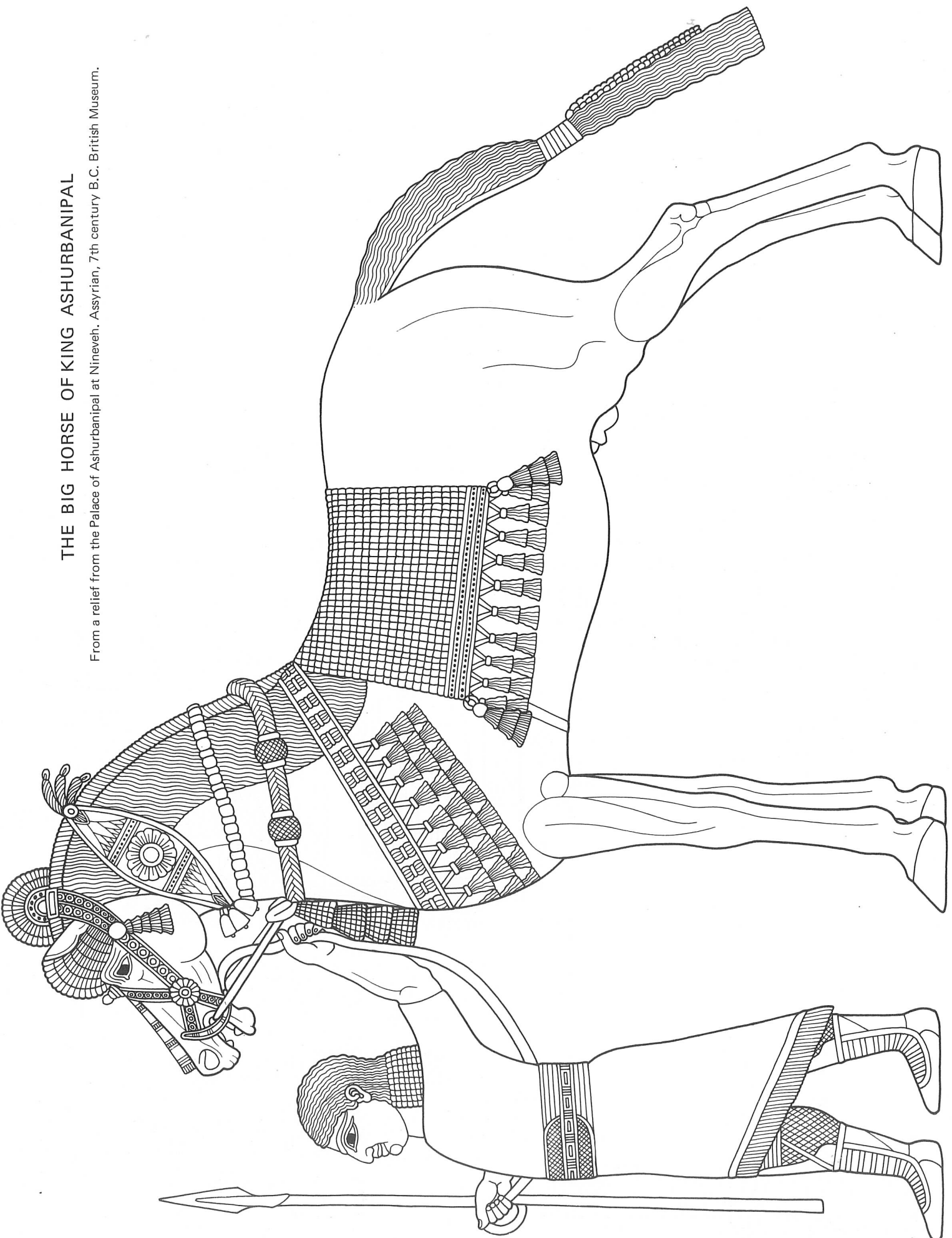


A HITTITE SPHINX

From a relief from Carchemish, Neo-Hittite, 1050-850 B.C. Ankara.

The Hittites gradually formed a political unit out of the native and invading peoples of Anatolia, starting around 1800 B.C. King Suppiluliumas c. 1380-c. 1345 B.C. began expansion into North Syria and Upper Mesopotamia. Hittites continued to expand to the south-east, and by c. 1260 B.C. they signed a peace treaty with Egypt. About 1200 the "Peoples of the sea" invaded the Near East and broke the power of the Hittites. However, small states in North Syria remained partly Hittite for the next few centuries. Carchemish was the chief of these Neo-Hittite centers until it fell to Assyria in 717 B.C.





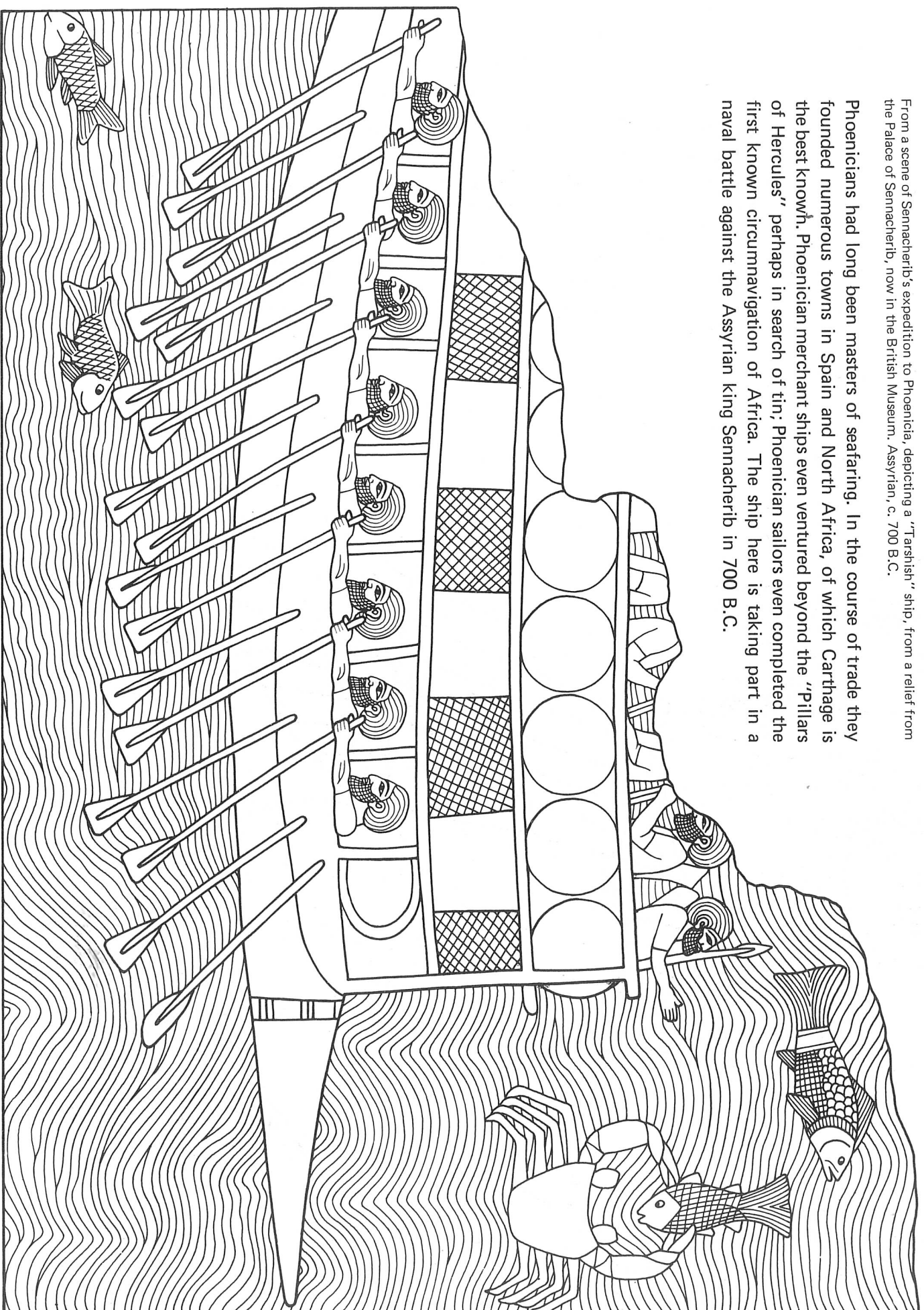
From a relief from the Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, Assyrian, 7th century B.C. British Museum.

THE BIG HORSE OF KING ASHURBANIPAL

A PHOENICIAN WARSHIP

From a scene of Sennacherib's expedition to Phoenicia, depicting a "Tarshish" ship, from a relief from the Palace of Sennacherib, now in the British Museum, Assyrian, c. 700 B.C.

Phoenicians had long been masters of seafaring. In the course of trade they founded numerous towns in Spain and North Africa, of which Carthage is the best known. Phoenician merchant ships even ventured beyond the "Pillars of Hercules" perhaps in search of tin; Phoenician sailors even completed the first known circumnavigation of Africa. The ship here is taking part in a naval battle against the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 700 B.C.

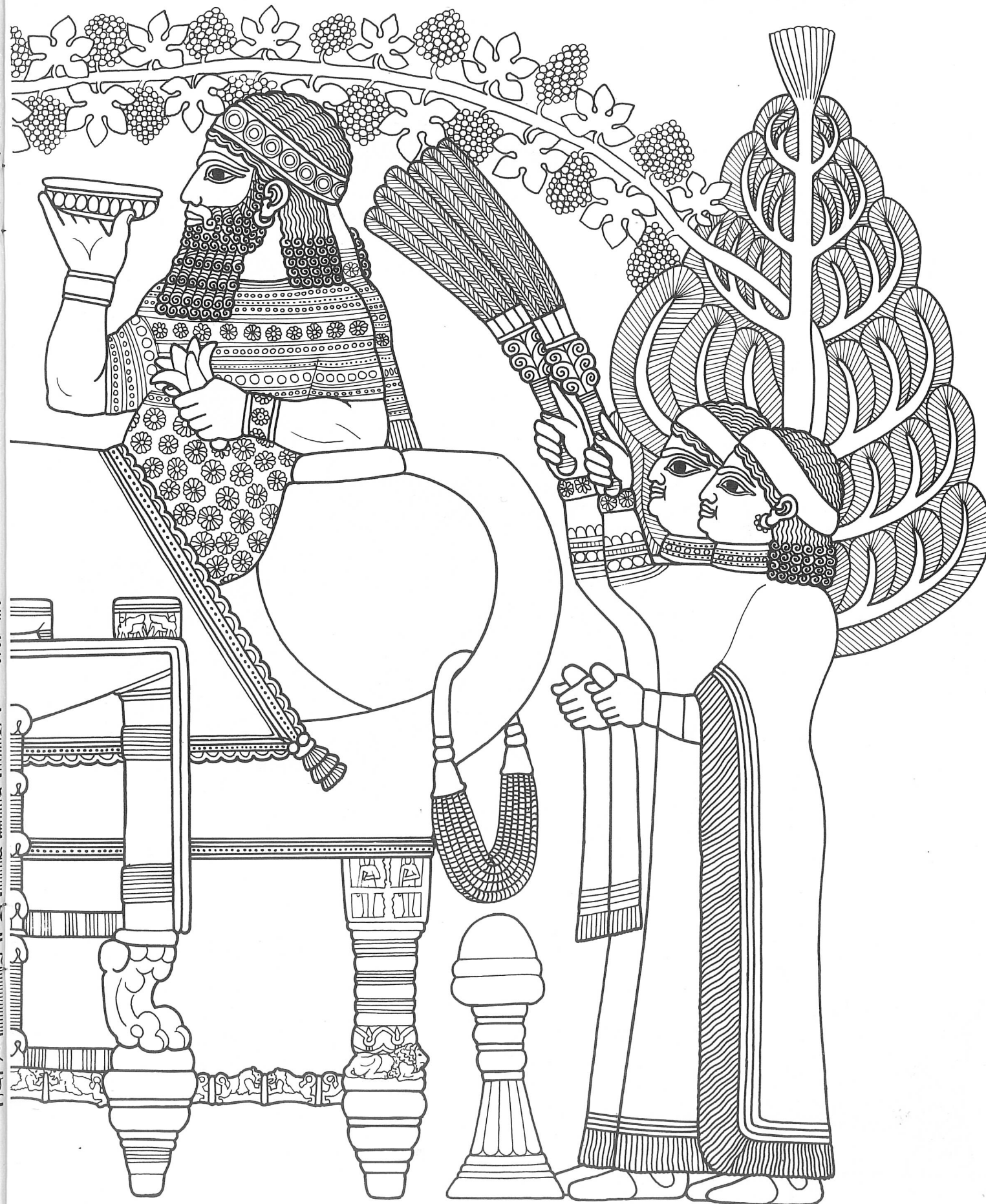


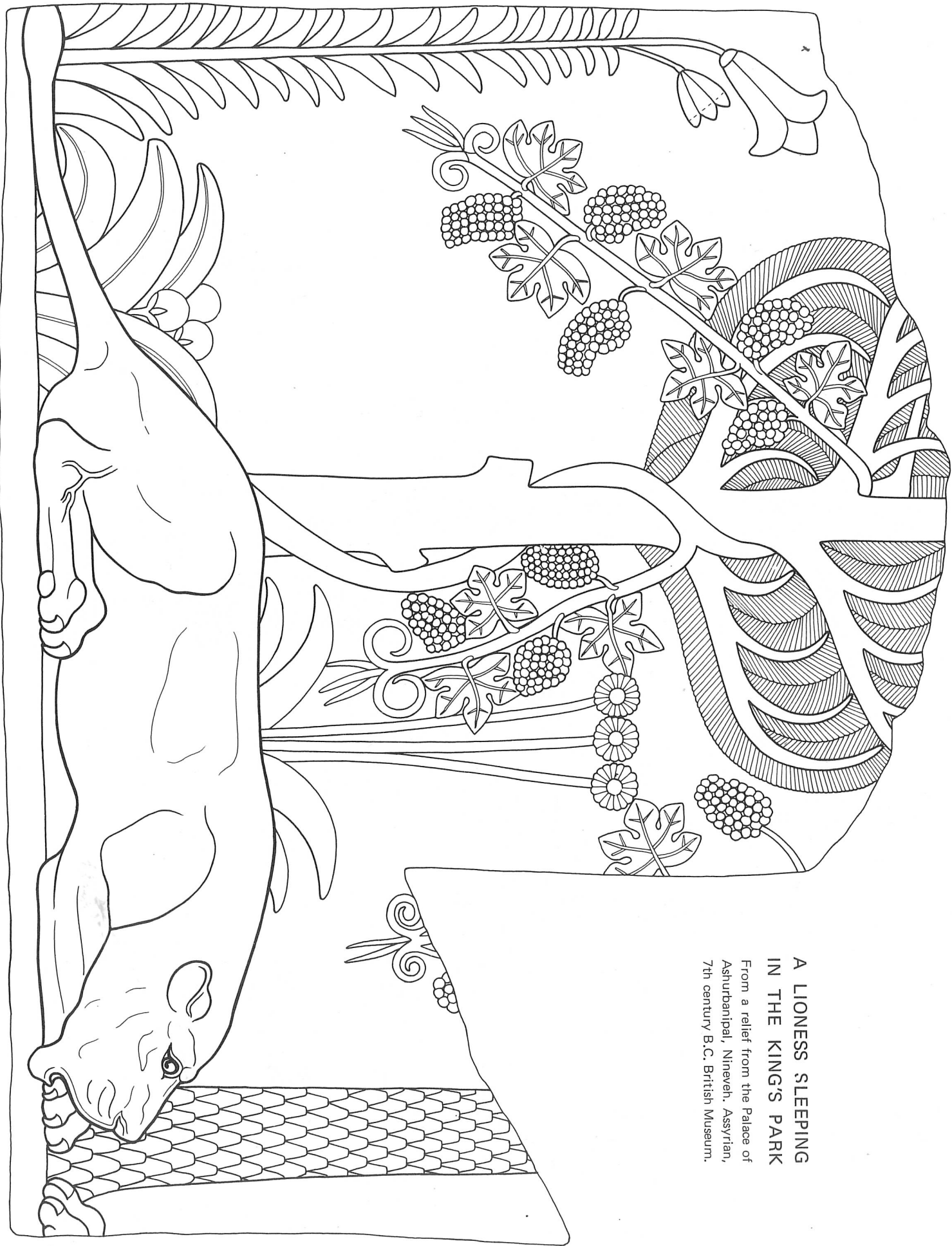
KING ASHURBANIPAL DINING WITH HIS WIFE

From a relief from the Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh. Assyrian, 7th century B.C. British Museum.



The king is celebrating his victory over Tempt-Humban-Inshushinak, King of Elam.

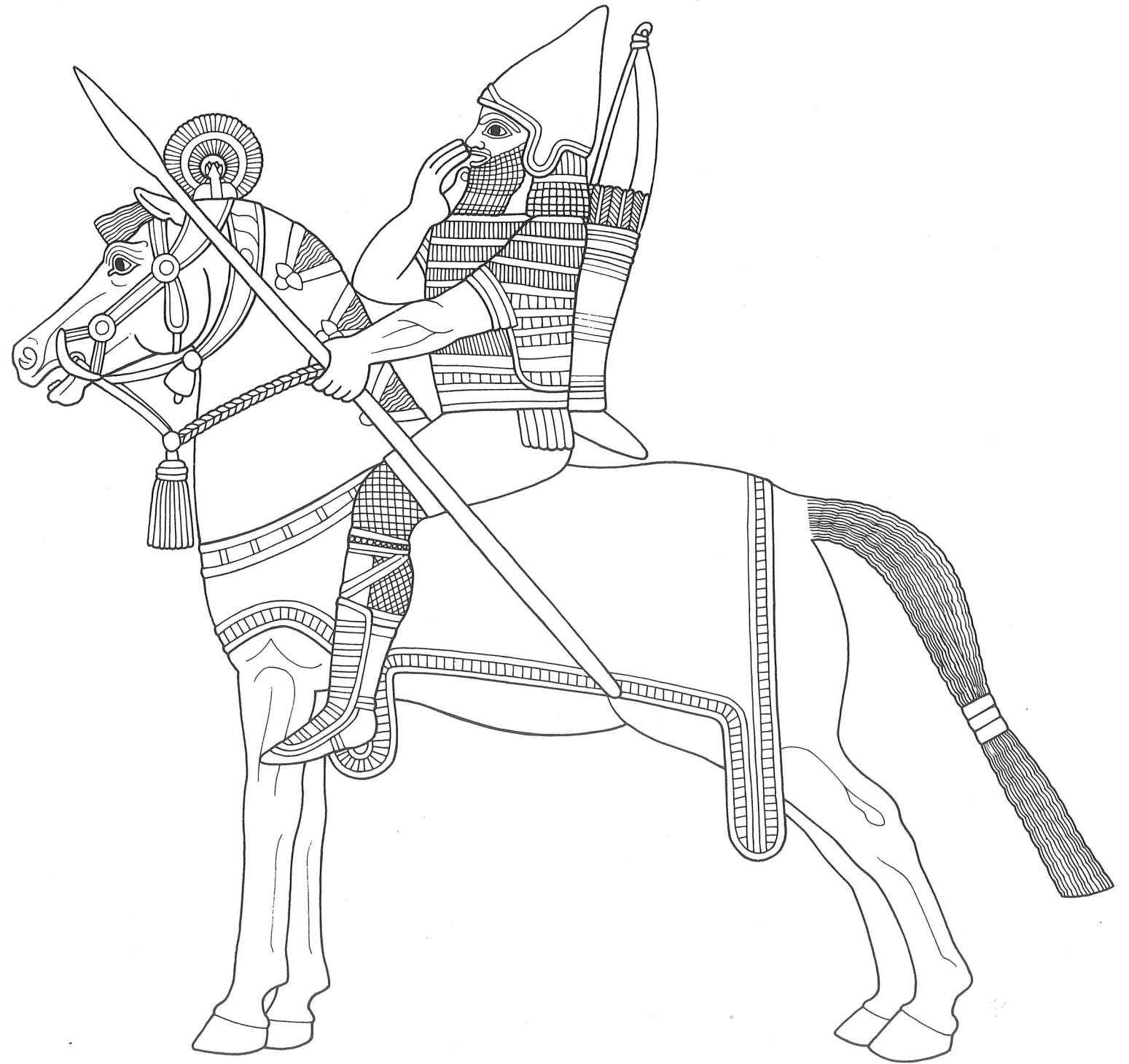


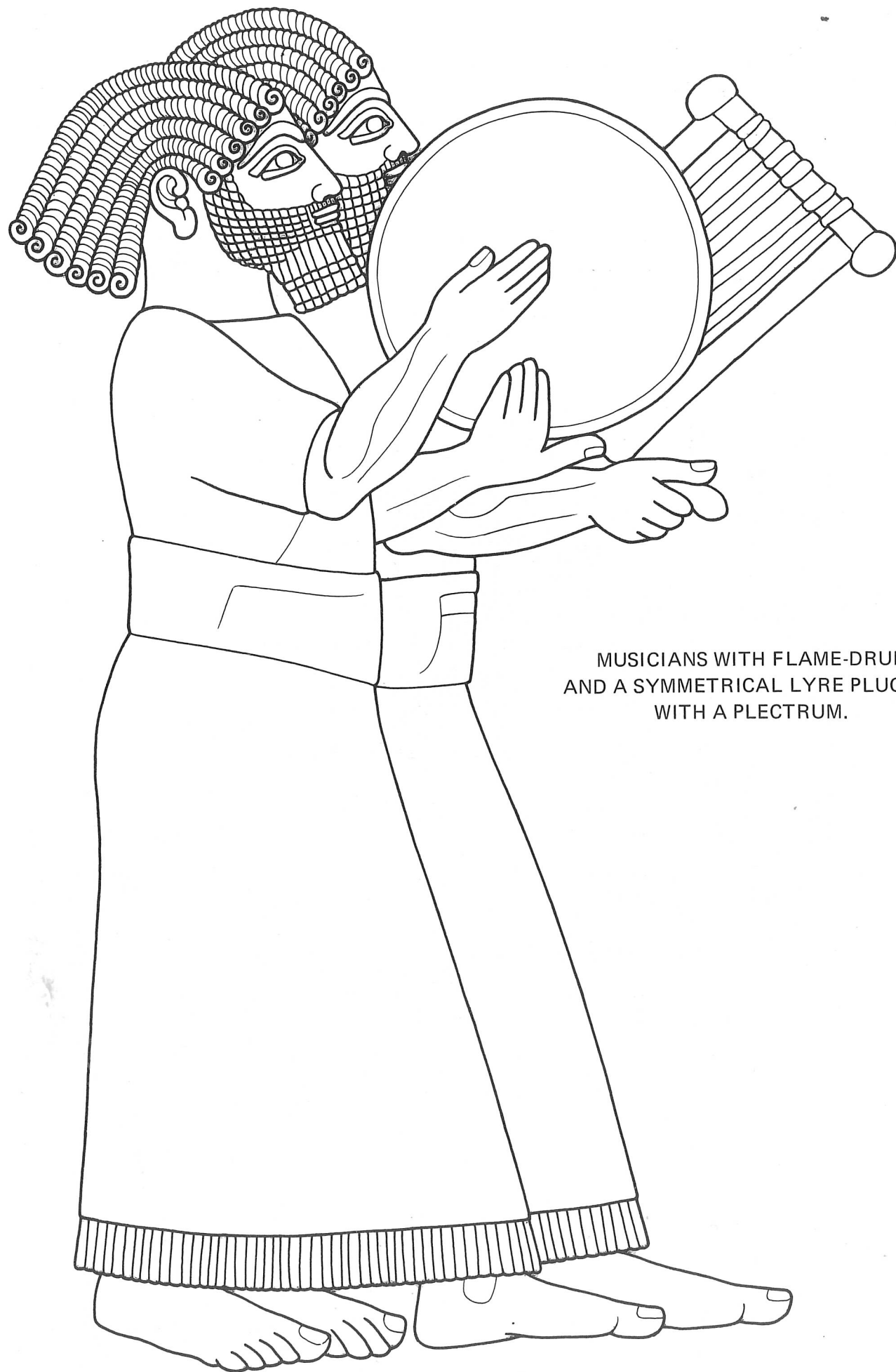


A LIONESS SLEEPING
IN THE KING'S PARK
From a relief from the Palace of
Ashurbanipal, Nineveh. Assyrian,
7th century B.C. British Museum.

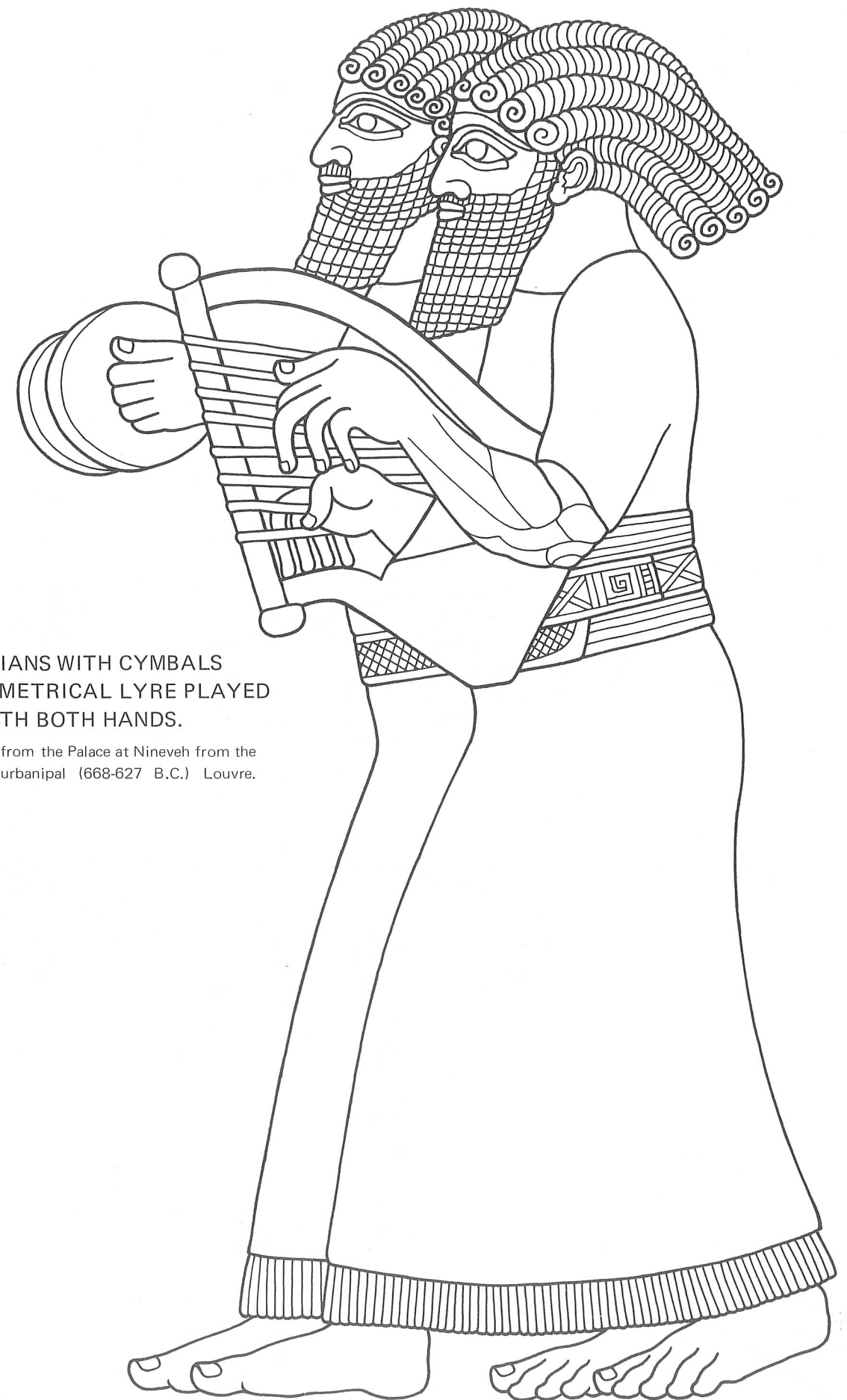
AN ASSYRIAN CAVALRYMAN SHOUTING

From a relief from Nineveh. Assyrian, 7th century B.C. Louvre.



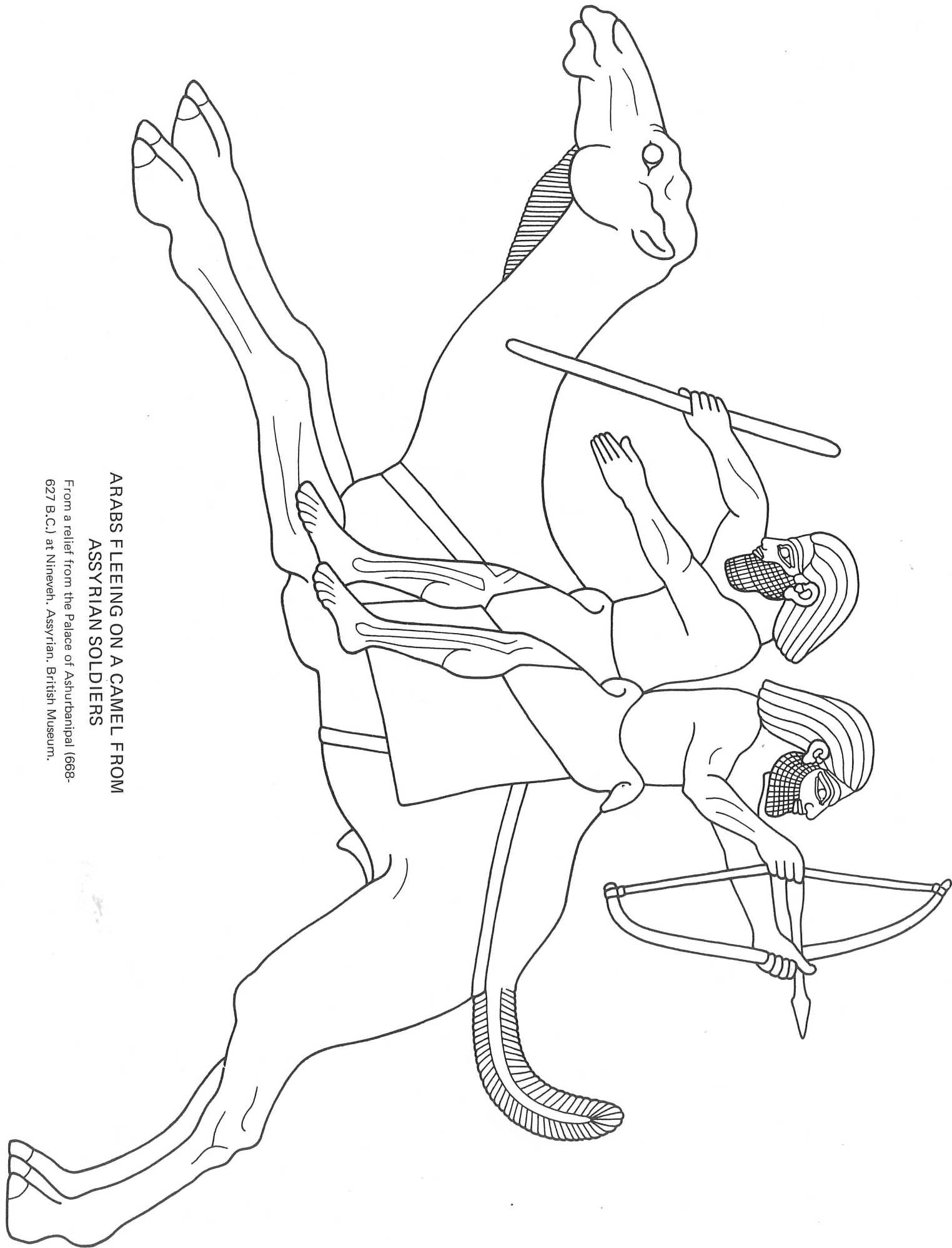


MUSICIANS WITH FLAME-DRUM
AND A SYMMETRICAL LYRE PLUCKED
WITH A PLECTRUM.



MUSICIANS WITH CYMBALS
AND ASYMMETRICAL LYRE PLAYED
WITH BOTH HANDS.

From a relief from the Palace at Nineveh from the
time of Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.) Louvre.



ARABS FLEEING ON A CAMEL FROM
ASSYRIAN SOLDIERS

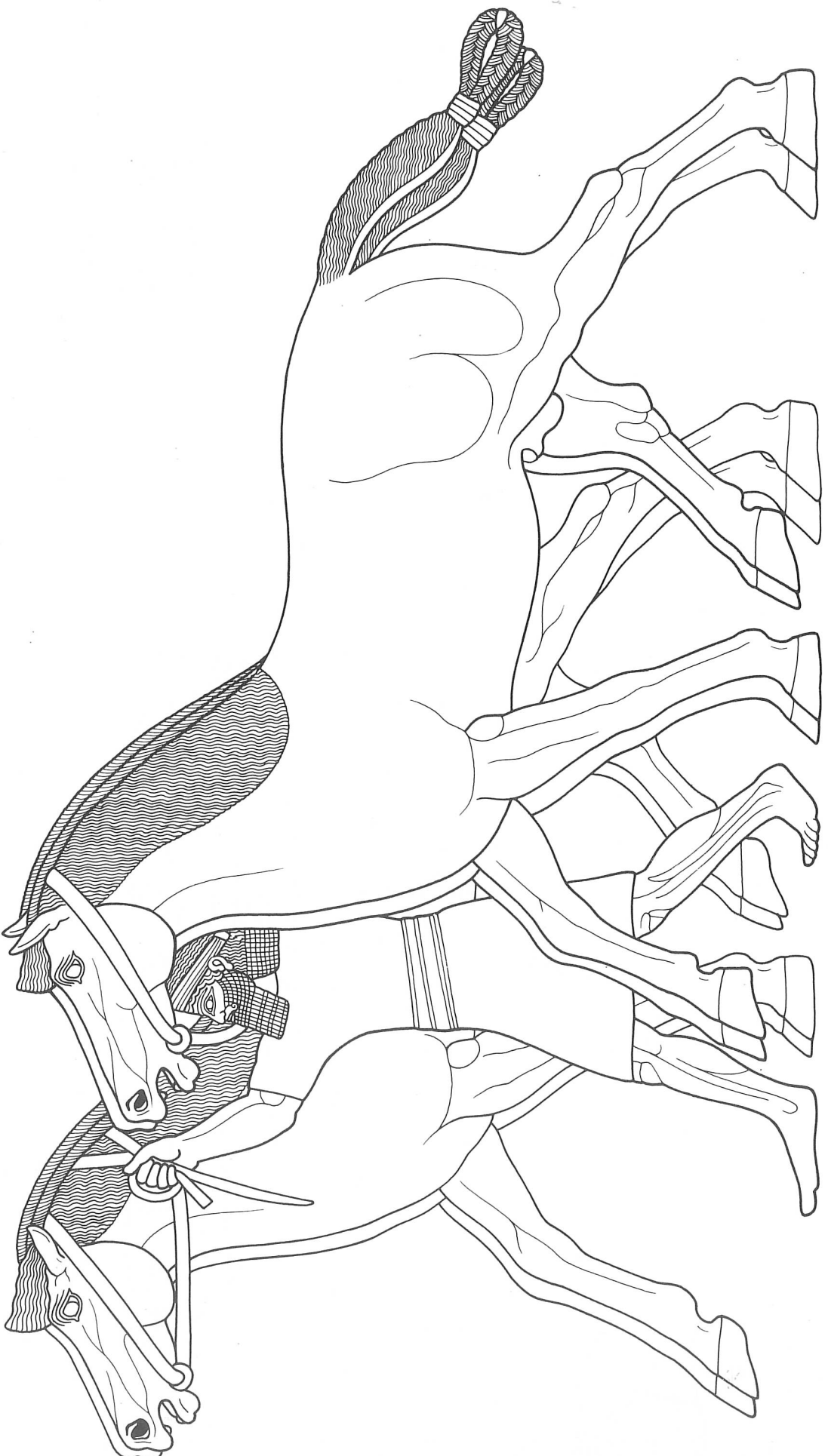
From a relief from the Palace of Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.) at Nineveh. Assyrian. British Museum.



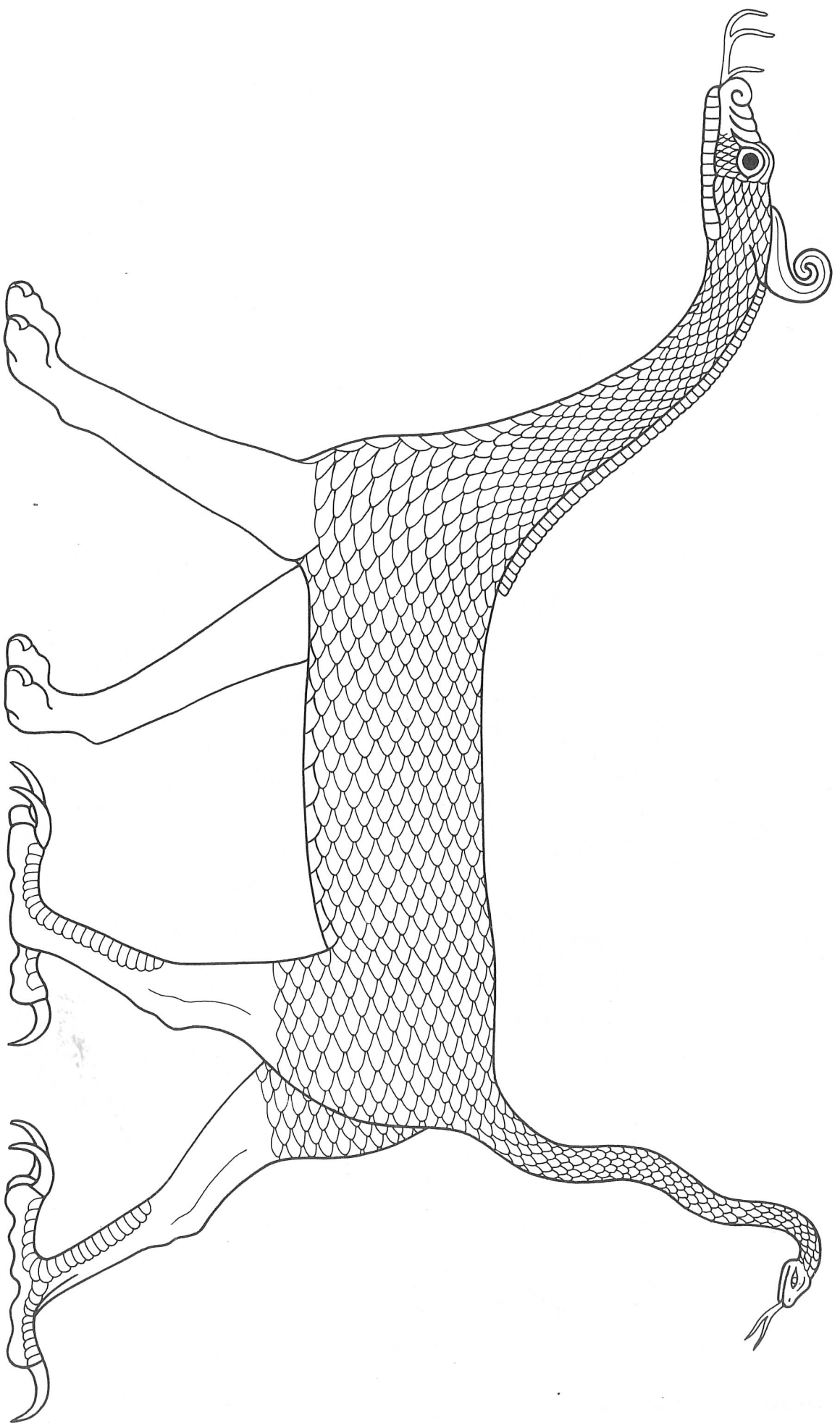
A WINGED PROTECTIVE DIVINITY

From a relief from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.), Assyrian; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The pomegranate bough was probably a fertility symbol; the mace is an insignia of power and royalty.



THE HORSES OF ASHURBANIPAL
 From a relief from the Palace of Ashurbanipal at
 Nineveh, Assyrian, 7th century B.C. British Museum.



A BABYLONIAN DRAGON
 From a glazed brick relief from the
 Ishtar Gate at Babylon. Neo-Baby-
 lonian, 6th century B.C. Pergamon
 Museum, East Berlin.

XERXES AND AN ATTENDANT

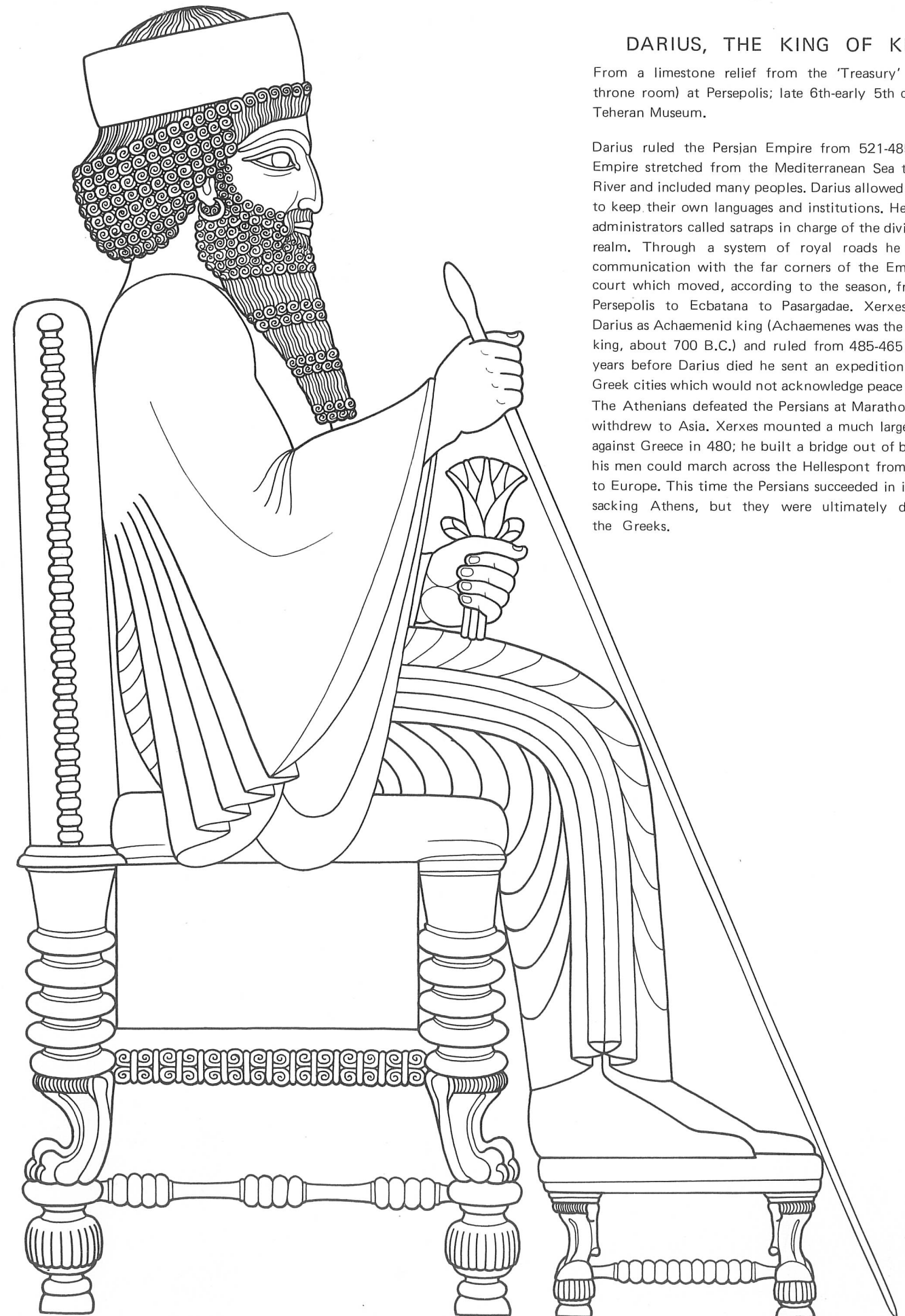
From a limestone relief from the 'Treasury' (temporary throne room) at Persepolis; late 6th-early 5th century B.C. Teheran Museum.

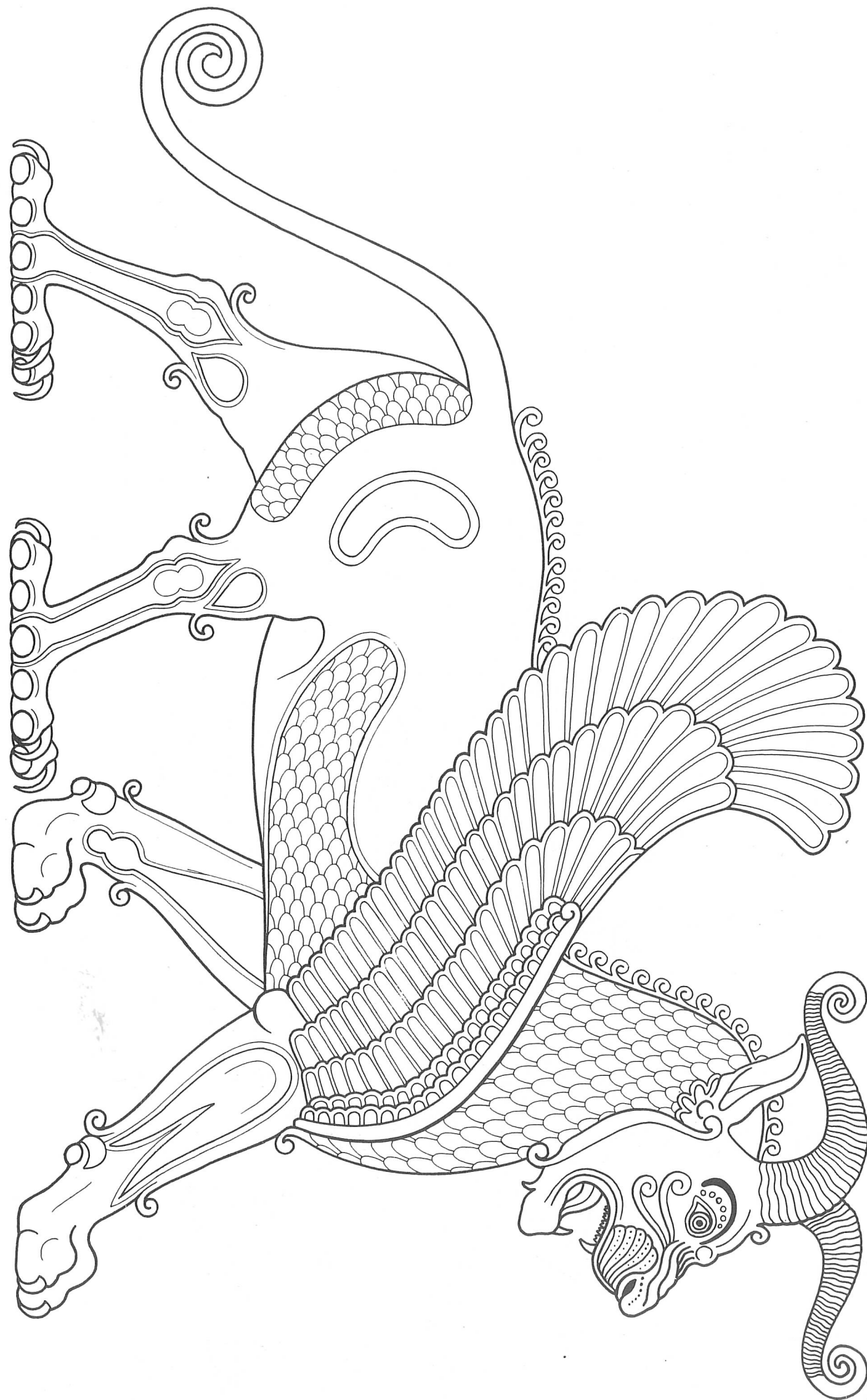


DARIUS, THE KING OF KINGS

From a limestone relief from the 'Treasury' (temporary throne room) at Persepolis; late 6th-early 5th century B.C. Teheran Museum.

Darius ruled the Persian Empire from 521-485 B.C. The Empire stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus River and included many peoples. Darius allowed his subjects to keep their own languages and institutions. He set Persian administrators called satraps in charge of the divisions of the realm. Through a system of royal roads he maintained communication with the far corners of the Empire from a court which moved, according to the season, from Susa to Persepolis to Ecbatana to Pasargadae. Xerxes succeeded Darius as Achaemenid king (Achaemenes was the first Persian king, about 700 B.C.) and ruled from 485-465 B.C. A few years before Darius died he sent an expedition against the Greek cities which would not acknowledge peace with Persia. The Athenians defeated the Persians at Marathon, and they withdrew to Asia. Xerxes mounted a much larger campaign against Greece in 480; he built a bridge out of boats so that his men could march across the Hellespont from Asia Minor to Europe. This time the Persians succeeded in invading and sacking Athens, but they were ultimately defeated by the Greeks.





From a glazed brick relief from Susa, Achaemenid, 5th century B.C.

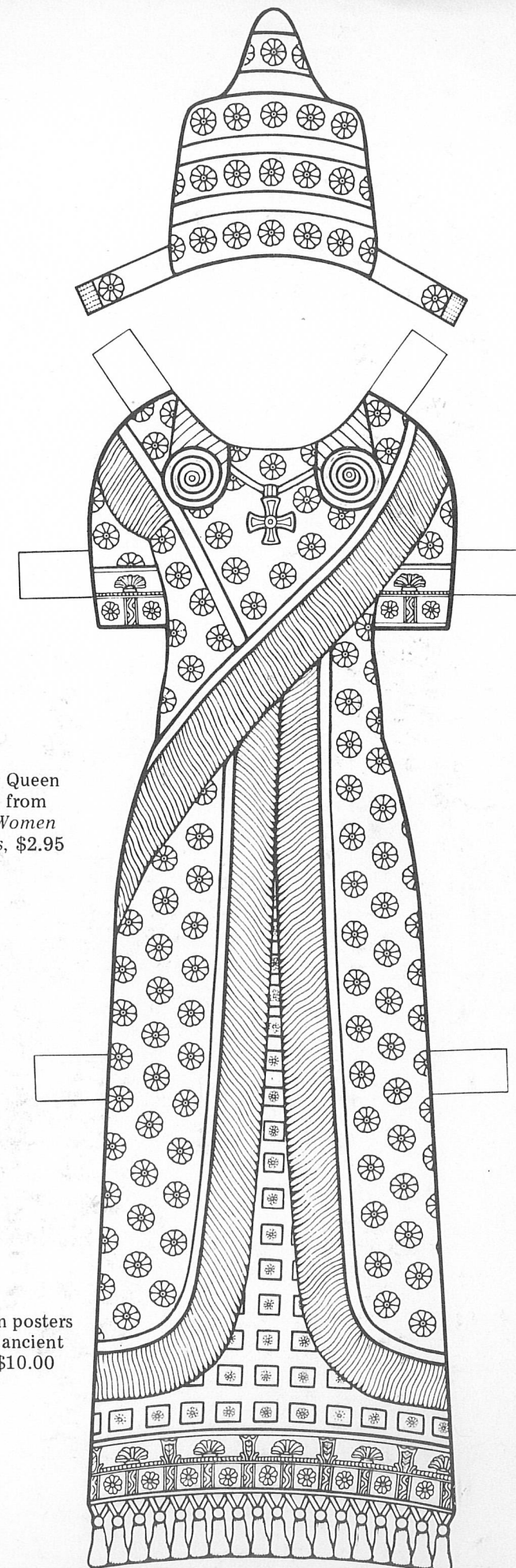
A WINGED LION-GRIFFIN

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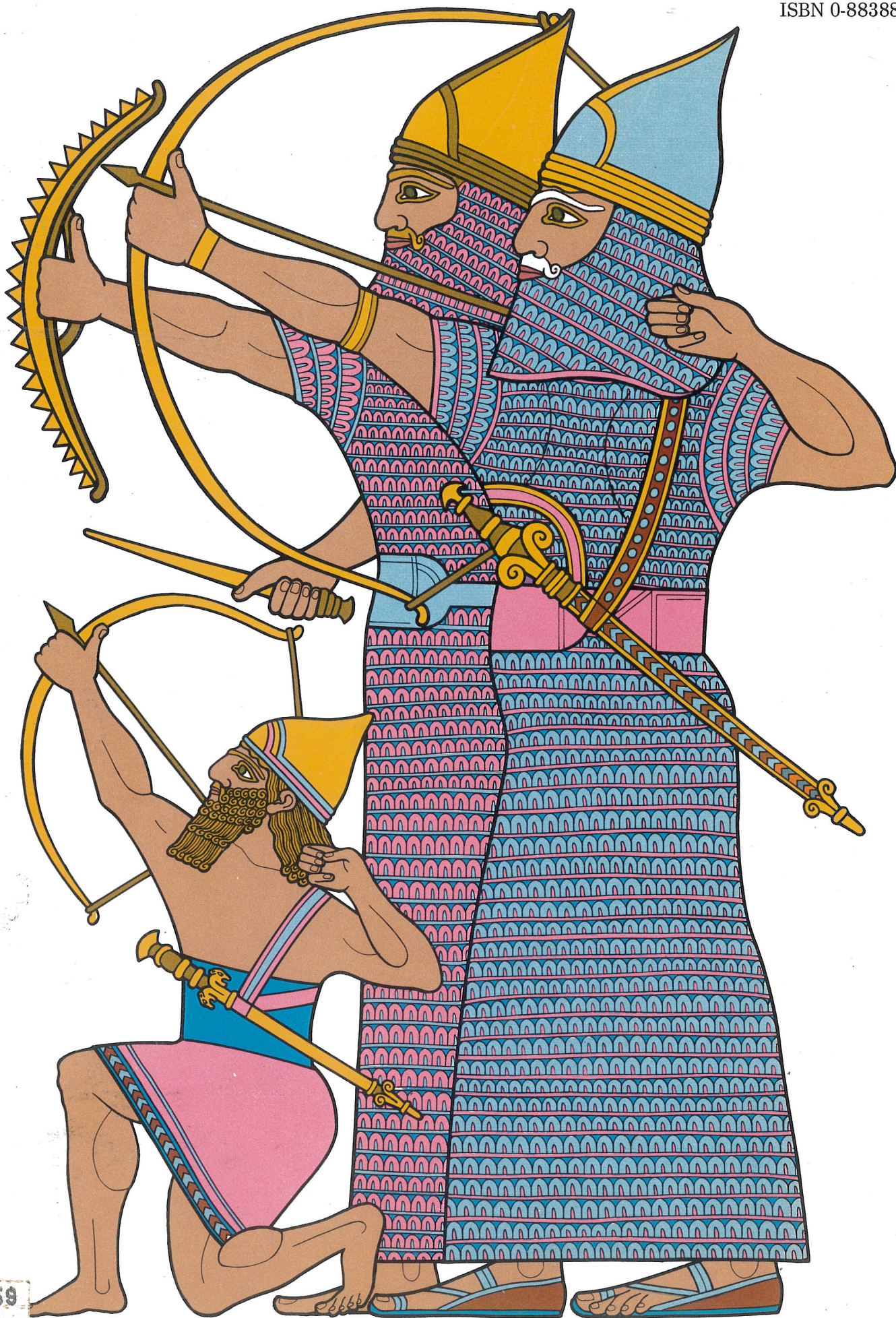
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